PRICE $8.99

THE NEW YORKER

JULY 4, 2022



VISIT…

LANZAROTE Caliente.com


FTX


I'M IN ON FTX
BECAUSE WE SHARE A
PASSION FOR CREATING
POSITIVE CHANGE.
THE FUTURE OF INVESTING IS FTX. YOU IN?
GISELE BÜNDCHEN FTX PARTNER





I'M IN ON CRYPTO
BECAUSE I WANT TO
MAKE THE BIGGEST
GLOBAL IMPACT
FOR GOOD.
THE FUTURE OF INVESTING IS FTX. YOU IN?
SAM BANKMAN-FRIED
FTX
FOUNDER

THE
NEW YORKER

JULY 4, 2022

8 GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN

15 THE TALK OF THE TOWN
Jia Tolentino on the Supreme Court's decision to overturn Roe v. Wade and end abortion rights; right-wing headlines; directing in miniature.

ANNALS OF NATURE
Annie Proulx 20 Swamped
Why our wetlands matter.

SHOUTS & MURMURS
Mike O'Brien 27 Missed Connections, 1/7/21

ONWARD AND UPWARD WITH THE ARTS
Anna Wiener 28 Noise Makers
The sound of movies.

LETTER FROM BUDAPEST
Andrew Marantz 36 The Illiberal Order
What do American conservatives see in Hungary?

PROFILES
David Remnick 48 Keeping Faith
The legendary career of the gospel singer Mavis Staples.

SKETCHBOOK
Edward Steed 55 "Delegates"

FICTION
Lauren Groff 58 "To Sunland"

THE CRITICS

THE CURRENT CINEMA
Anthony Lane 65 *"Elvis."*

BOOKS
67 Briefly Noted
Louis Menand 68 *The creation of the modern-art market.*

MUSICAL EVENTS
Alex Ross 72 *The Ojai Music Festival.*

THE THEATRE
Vinson Cunningham 74 *"Corsicana," "Epiphany."*

POEMS
Nell Wright 42 "Fracture Story"
Mary Jo Bang 61 "The Bread, the Butter, the Orange Marmalade"

COVER
Chris Ware "House Divided"

DRAWINGS *Paul Noth, Suerynn Lee, Lonnie Millsap, Sarah Kempa, Zachary Kanin, Navied Mahdavian, Kim Warp, Roz Chast, Lars Kenseth, George Booth, Edward Koren, Julia Suits, Will McPhail* SPOTS *Nishant Choksi*

ADVERTISEMENT



"This book is the ultimate collectible coffee-table book for anyone that loves the world of superheroes."

—FRANK MILLER, CREATOR OF *300* AND *SIN CITY*

"*Pulp Power* is the definitive account of how The Shadow and Doc Savage shaped the superhero-obsessed world of today."

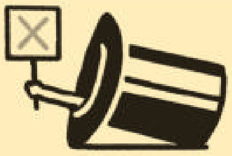
—DAN DiDIO, FORMER PUBLISHER OF DC COMICS

From the Condé Nast Archives, *Pulp Power: The Shadow, Doc Savage, and the Art of the Street & Smith Universe* gives fans a rare glimpse into the prewar pulp-novel decades of the 1930s and 1940s, a period of bold action and adventure storytelling that ultimately led to the creation of superheroes we know and love today. Author Neil McGinness provides context for the cover illustrations alongside a rich narrative history of the characters and era and discussion of the influence of the Street & Smith heroes on creators such as Orson Welles, George Lucas, James Patterson, Walter Mosley, Dwayne Johnson, Jim Steranko, Jim Lee, Gail Simone, Steve Orlando, Gayle Lynds, and many more. The book also includes original line-art illustrations from the volumes, a unique collection of Shadow ephemera, cover art from the paperback boom of the 1960s and 1970s, and a look at the past, present, and future of the Street & Smith characters in comics.
Pulp Power is the ultimate coffee-table collectible book for all who love the world of superheroes.

ABRAMSBOOKS.COM

BY NEIL McGINNESS
FOREWORD BY FRANK MILLER

Available Soon
Wherever Books
Are Sold



THE NEW YORKER'S
NAME DROP



Prove you know who's who.

Six clues, a hundred seconds, and one chance to guess a notable person's identity.

Play *The New Yorker's* trivia game every weekday at **newyorker.com/namedrop**

Scan and scroll down to play.

CONTRIBUTORS

Andrew Marantz (*"The Illiberal Order," p. 36*), a staff writer, published "Antisocial: Online Extremists, Techno-Utopians, and the Hijacking of the American Conversation" in 2019.

Annie Proulx (*"Swamped," p. 20*) is the author of "Fen, Bog & Swamp: A Short History of Peatland Destruction and Its Role in the Climate Crisis," which is due out in September.

Edward Steed (*Sketchbook, p. 55*) began contributing cartoons to the magazine in 2013.

Nell Wright (*Poem, p. 42*), a poet and a visual artist, is at work on her first book.

Bill Adair (*The Talk of the Town, p. 18*) is a professor of journalism and public policy at Duke University. He is the founder of the Web site PolitiFact.

Jia Tolentino (*Comment, p. 15*) became a staff writer in 2016. Her first book, the essay collection "Trick Mirror," came out in 2019.

Anna Wiener (*"Noise Makers," p. 28*) is a contributing writer for the magazine and the author of "Uncanny Valley."

Chris Ware (*Cover*) has contributed graphic fiction and covers to *The New Yorker* since 1999. A retrospective of his work is on display at the Centre Pompidou, in Paris, through October 10th.

Mary Jo Bang (*Poem, p. 61*) published a translation of Dante's Purgatorio last year. "Colonies of Paradise," which collects her translations of poems by Matthias Göritz, will be out in October.

Louis Menand (*Books, p. 68*), a staff writer, is the author of, most recently, "The Free World."

Lauren Groff (*Fiction, p. 58*) received the 2018-19 Story Prize for the short-story collection "Florida." Her latest novel is "Matrix."

Vinson Cunningham (*The Theatre, p. 74*) is a theatre critic for the magazine. His début novel is forthcoming next year.

THIS WEEK ON NEWYORKER.COM



THE POLITICAL SCENE
Benjamin Wallace-Wells on why Republicans are using a new brand of conservatism to wage the culture wars.



ANNALS OF EDUCATION
Emma Green writes about L.G.B.T.Q. faculty's struggle for acceptance at Christian colleges.

LEFT: PAUL HENNESSY; RIGHT: MARGARET ALBAUGH

Download the New Yorker app for the latest news, commentary, criticism, and humor, plus this week's magazine and all issues back to 2008.

THE MAIL

FLIGHT ATTENDANCE

Jennifer Gonnerman, in her reporting on flight attendants fighting for better treatment, mentions that my sister, Sandie Hendrix, a stewardess at United, was fired, in 1972, after weighing in at a hundred and twenty-seven pounds ("Highflier," May 30th). It's worth noting what happened afterward, too. Sandie played a pivotal role in a lawsuit against United, and she eventually got her job back, with back pay and seniority restored, as if she had never left. Unfortunately, the other flight attendants were none too welcoming upon Sandie's return; they resented that she had kept pace in seniority (which determined flight schedules and home bases) without, as they saw it, having worked for it. Sandie and her fellow-returnees were ever after called the "wide-bodies."

Linda Hendrix McPharlin
San Francisco, Calif.

GREAT DEEDS, GREAT DANGER

William Finnegan perfectly captures the peculiar world of big-wave surfing, and rightly crowns Kai Lenny the undisputed king ("Big Breaks," May 30th). A quibble: there is no discussion in the article about the correlation between big-wave wipeouts and concussions. The La Jolla local Derek Dunfee hung it up, some time after winning the Monster Paddle Award, in 2009, owing to cumulative brain injuries, the prevention of which is a cause that he has since championed. In the piece, Finnegan quotes an essay that compares Lenny to Reinhold Messner, who climbed fourteen peaks above eight thousand metres without supplemental oxygen. Those feats, though celebrated by mountaineers, risked hypoxic brain injury. For imitators of Messner and Lenny, the damage itself might prove intoxicating: impairment of the frontal lobe may well contribute to lessened inhibition, and, in turn, to further amazing deeds—and harm.

Glenn Vanstrum
La Jolla, Calif.

FREEWHEELERS

In Jill Lepore's essay about her life (and near-deaths) on a bike, she remarks that, historically, cycling's sense of freedom has been especially meaningful to women (Books, May 30th). Indeed, the cycling craze of the eighteen-nineties, especially in the U.K. and the U.S., coincided with the New Woman movement, in which many middle-class women questioned marriage, sought sexual autonomy, and found work outside the home. In 1894, in Boston, a twenty-three-year-old Jewish Latvian immigrant, Annie Kopchovsky, a mother of three, left home to become the first woman to bicycle the globe. Dubbed Annie Londonderry, she was sponsored by a New Hampshire water company, and regaled crowds with tall tales. (Her circumnavigation—which she later framed as a New Woman's exploit—may itself have been something of a fiction.) She died in obscurity, but her story rolls on—in, among other iterations, the musical "Spin"—as proof that the cycling revolution remains deeply meaningful to many girls and women, generations down the road.

Brian Gibson
Annapolis Royal, N.S.

CONTINENTAL DIVIDE

Lauren Collins's article on the predilection of the French for "taking the waters" omits any mention of Belgium, even though the town of Spa, in the Ardennes, was an important early destination for water cures ("Soaking It In," May 30th). It's not the first time that Belgium has been overlooked in favor of France. Although this small country has much to offer, it doesn't often feature on the Anglo-Saxon radar.

Richard Lewis
Tervuren, Belgium

•

Letters should be sent with the writer's name, address, and daytime phone number via e-mail to themail@newyorker.com. Letters may be edited for length and clarity, and may be published in any medium. We regret that owing to the volume of correspondence we cannot reply to every letter.



2022–23 SEASON

TICKETS ON SALE NOW

Sondra Radvanovsky stars in the chilling title role of Cherubini's *Medea*

Be part of the Met's extraordinary new season, featuring seven thrilling new productions and three momentous Met premieres—including Kevin Puts's *The Hours*, starring Renée Fleming, Joyce DiDonato, and Kelli O'Hara.

metopera.org 212.362.6000
Tickets start at $25

PAOLA KUDACKI / MET OPERA

GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN



In 1998, the **Asia Society** introduced Americans to a new art scene emerging from China in the seminal show "Inside/Out." Through Aug. 14, the museum presents a sequel of sorts: "Mirror Image: A Transformation of Chinese Identity." Its curator, Barbara Pollack, presents works by seven artists, all born after 1976, for whom the binary of East versus West is essentially moot. Pixy Liao—whose gender-norm-defying photograph "Shoulder," from 2021, is seen here—grew up in Shanghai and is now based in Brooklyn.

As ever, it's advisable to check in advance to confirm engagements.

DANCE

American Ballet Theatre

A.B.T.'s production of "Swan Lake," from 2000, staged by its outgoing artistic director, Kevin McKenzie, is lavish and traditional and ends with a spectacular leap into the lake for the lovers. The company rolls out seven different casts for this season's performances, June 27-July 6. On June 27 and July 1, the dramatic Devon Teuscher will be joined by Joo Won Ahn, in his début as Prince Siegfried. On June 28 and at the July 2 matinée, Isabella Boylston—an effervescent stage presence—will be joined by Daniel Camargo, an impeccable classicist, formerly of the Dutch National Ballet, brought over as a guest artist for the season. Other intriguing débuts include the melancholy, graceful Calvin Royal in the princely lead, on June 29 and July 4, and Catherine Hurlin—a firecracker—as the Swan Queen, at the July 6 matinée.—*Marina Harss (Metropolitan Opera House; through July 16.)*

Milka Djordjevich

After multiple pandemic delays, Djordjevich's "CORPS" finally gets its New York première. Part of her ongoing investigation into anonymity in motion, the work casts a cold eye on the regimented choreography of marching bands and drum corps and their roots in military drill, putting the rules to a kind of stress test.—*Brian Seibert (New York Live Arts; June 30 and July 1.)*

Jacob's Pillow Dance Festival

For more than thirty-five years, the choreographer Ronald K. Brown has produced works that combine a sense of the transcendence of the spirit with a movement style rooted in the pleasure of grooving to music. While watching one of his dances, it is difficult to sit still. The performances by his company, Ronald K. Brown/EVIDENCE, at Jacob's Pillow's Ted Shawn Theatre, in Becket, Mass., include older works, such as "Gatekeepers" (1999), set to music by the British Nigerian singer Wunmi. But they also feature a new piece, with music by the jazz composer Jason Moran and stirring text by the political activist and academic Angela Davis. It is Brown's first new dance since suffering a stroke in April. Meanwhile, on the festival's outdoor stage, the stylistically versatile L.A.-based company Bodytraffic performs works by the ballet choreographer Matthew Neenan, the neo-minimalist Brian Brooks, and the L.A.-based choreographer Micaela Taylor.—*M.H. (June 29-July 3.)*

Tap City

The New York City tap festival returns, in person for the first time since 2019, with a full array of classes and events. The lineup for "Rhythm in Motion," a sampler of tap choreography at Symphony Space on July 9, is short on major players but includes the talented Demi Remick, Jared Alexander, and Kaleena Miller. On July 10, a massive cast assembles in Times Square for "Tap It Out," a free demonstration.—*B.S. (July 4-10.)*

Christopher Williams

An artist with an imagination both scholastic and subversive, Williams has lately been creating contemporary queer remakes of early-twentieth-century works by the Ballets Russes. This program at the Joyce débuts two more, both of which loom large in the ballet canon: "Les Sylphides," set to Chopin, and "The Afternoon of a Faun," set to the eponymous Debussy score. Where the originals had Nijinsky, these have the New York City Ballet star Taylor Stanley, who brings a guarantee of unconventional beauty, as do costumes by the brilliant Andrew Jordan.—*B.S. (Joyce Theatre; June 28-July 3.)*

THE THEATRE

Chains

This welcome Mint production, the first back in the company's Forty-second Street home in nearly two and a half years, is a refined affair, though there's no lack of desperation seething just below the surface of these parlors and dining rooms in the London suburbs. Elizabeth Baker's play, which opened in 1909, caused a stir with its reflection of the growing pains, societal limitations, and economic injustices of a changing British nation. When Fred Tennant (Peterson Townsend), a lodger, announces his intention to chuck his safe, soul-deadening job as a clerk in the city and try his luck in the wilds of Australia, he's met with disbelief and derision. But Charley Wilson (Jeremy Beck), his landlord and co-worker, sick of his position and his crummy little back-yard garden, is stirred by the move. So is Charley's sister-in-law, Maggie Massey (Olivia Gilliatt), who sees her impending marriage for the sentence of servitude it surely will be. Decisions are made; relationships are altered. It's all perfectly modulated by the director, Jenn Thompson, amid a marvellous set designed by John McDermott. The cast of eleven, most in their Mint débuts, is impeccable. Brian Owen makes a particularly big, boisterous impression as Morton Leslie, the loudmouthed neighbor.—*Ken Marks (Theatre Row; through July 23.)*

The Orchard

On one level, this is a mostly faithful staging of Anton Chekhov's "The Cherry Orchard," adapted by Igor Golyak and Carol Rocamora, with splendid performances all around—especially Jessica Hecht's dreamy, deluded Ranevskaya and Mikhail Baryshnikov's endearing and slightly clownish Firs. A few characters have been subtracted. And there's one big addition: an enormous robotic arm, with a camera attached, in the center of the stage. Also, Charlotta's little dog is replaced by a robot, stage directions are sometimes projected as computer prompts, and characters occasionally deliver entire monologues in languages other than English. Why? Only Golyak, who also directs, can say for sure. At the very least, the embellishments lend a welcome weirdness to a familiar story, and the production is sturdy enough that it's never less than absorbing. There's also an online virtual experience that intersects with the live show, adding some superfluous and confusing interactive elements and an additional performance by Baryshnikov, this time as Chekhov.—*Rollo Romig (Baryshnikov Arts Center; through July 3.)*

soft

Mr. Isaiah (Biko Eisen-Martin) teaches a lot more than English to the kids in his class. He teaches them how to relate to one another and to the world; he teaches them how to be men. He has his work cut out for him—Donja R. Love's play is set in a boarding school for

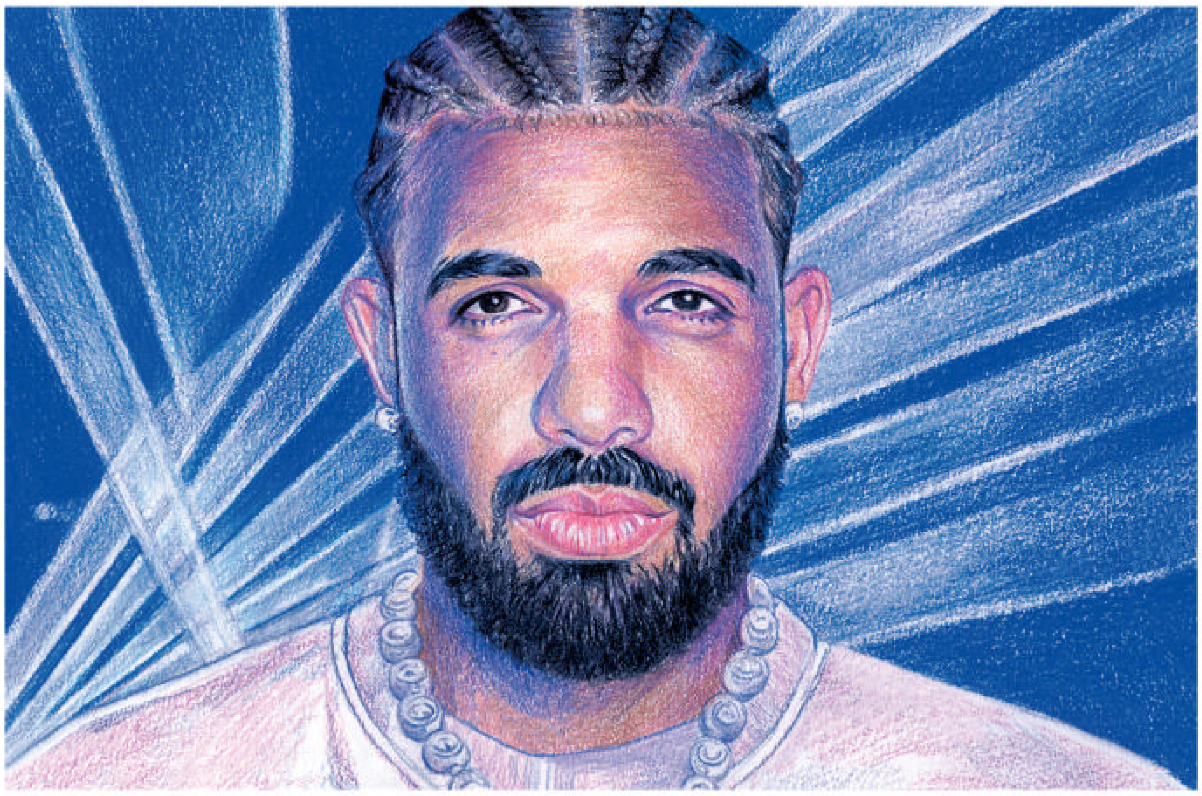
CONTEMPORARY DANCE



The choreographer **Pam Tanowitz** doesn't shy from daunting texts. At Bard College, in 2018, she was so bold as to create a dance around "Four Quartets," T. S. Eliot's long, paradox-riddled poem meditating on time and memory. The result was large-scaled but diaphanous, abounding in refractions of beauty and meaning. Back at Bard this year, as part of SummerScape, she's taking on the Song of Songs, which isn't so long but is Biblical, with its own potential paradoxes, at once erotic and spiritual. The new work, "Song of Songs" (at Bard's Fisher Center, in Annandale-on-Hudson, July 1-3), a collaboration with the composer David Lang, is Tanowitz's first to address her Jewish heritage. It's fair to expect duets, and also a deconstruction of what you might expect duets to be.—*Brian Seibert*

OPPOSITE: PIXY LIAO / COURTESY CHAMBERS FINE ART; RIGHT: ILLUSTRATION BY ANDRÉ DERAINNE

ELECTRONIC



Drake has assumed many forms over the years—oversharing rapper, pop star, world-music ambassador, playlist curator, cosigner—but he has been largely stagnant in the wake of his towering 2018 run, when he scored six top-five singles on the *Billboard* charts in seven months. He's now emerged, out of the blue, only a few months after the release of his underwhelming album "Certified Lover Boy," with the most provocative record of his career: **"Honestly, Nevermind,"** a minor reinvention that bends dance music, primarily house, to fit the contours of his sound and voice. This is music of the body that doesn't ask much of Drake as a songwriter, lyrically or structurally, but at its most irresistible—the flashy "Massive" and the cruising "Overdrive"—the album reëmphasizes the narcotic hookiness inherent to his melodies. It is far from Drake's best release, and it doesn't even feel like a significant work in his catalogue, but it is the first risk he's taken since ascending to the throne and the most interesting thing he's done in quite some time.—*Sheldon Pearce*

troubled youth, and Mr. Isaiah's six students are in various degrees of trouble. Directed by Whitney White, this MCC Theatre world première seethes with a palpable anger at the cages that hold Black and brown men—social and economic constraints, of course, but also destructive ideas of masculinity. Love has great affection for his characters, with their frustrations and dreams, and the tenderness they cannot show to others, or to themselves. Even when the show flirts with melodrama, the superlative, agile cast grounds it with sly humor and suggestions of wounded, testy vulnerability.—*Elisabeth Vincentelli (Susan & Ronald Frankel Theatre; through July 17.)*

MUSIC

Rodrigo Amarante

FOLK ROCK Like so much Brazilian music, Rodrigo Amarante's songs can seem injected with helium, forever threatening to take flight. Such weightlessness is earned through toil and technique, as the songwriter weaves intricate instrumentals into a dreamlike mesh behind his purr. Amarante began his career playing in the Rio de Janeiro band Los Hermanos; more recent adventures include collaborating with Fabrizio Moretti, of the Strokes (in the band Little Joy), and with the singer Devendra Banhart. Commercially triumphant in Brazil, Los Hermanos was steeped in American rock; Amarante is now based in the States, where, naturally, his muse turns to his homeland. At Le Poisson Rouge, he cuts the ribbon on this year's Brasil Summerfest, which spreads across the city in the weeks ahead. Further highlights include the percussionist Dendê (at Nublu 151, July 2) and the sinuous pop singer Céu (at Damrosch Park, July 6). Like Amarante, Céu writes songs that skip across sand without leaving a footprint.—*Jay Ruttenberg (Le Poisson Rouge; June 29.)*

Bargemusic

CLASSICAL Every weekend through the end of August, Bargemusic invites audiences onto its floating concert hall docked at Brooklyn Bridge Park. With the East River as a backdrop, the pianist Yael Weiss plays movements from three Beethoven sonatas alongside entries from "32 Bright Clouds," a commissioning project that asks composers from countries in conflict to write a piece incorporating the same motif from Beethoven's "Missa Solemnis" (July 1). Jeffrey Solow kicks off a two-part series of Bach's captivating cello suites (July 2). And Inna Faliks programs Clara Schumann's Piano Sonata in G Minor with Ravel's twinkling, devilishly difficult "Gaspard de la Nuit" (July 3).—*Oussama Zahr*

Bartees Strange: "Farm to Table"

INDIE ROCK The story of the artist Bartees Leon Cox, Jr., who performs as Bartees Strange, is as winding and as eclectic as his music. The son of an airman and an opera singer, he was born in England and raised in Oklahoma, and he worked as a press secretary in the Obama Administration before realizing his dream of making indie-rock music with a twist—mixing punk, R. & B., and rap influences and experimenting with synths, melodic styles, and cadences. Following the release of an EP that reimagined songs by the band the National, his breakthrough album, "Live Forever," from 2020, offered a potent cocktail of his many references that made room for revealing lyrics. "Farm to Table," his new LP (and his first on the indie mainstay 4AD), is bigger and bolder, nitpicking the details of his artistic life and validating his newfound position—as on "Cosigns," where he uses connections with Phoebe Bridgers, Lucy Dacus, and Courtney Barnett to vindicate his place in a genre that sometimes registers him as an outsider.—*Sheldon Pearce (Streaming on select platforms.)*

Emaenuel: "Sukistan"

ELECTRONIC Ambient music can wear down fast, even in the background. But although the Lagos experimental electronic-music producer Emaenuel often buries his music's rhythms, and generally keeps its foreground blurry, his début full-length, "Sukistan," which was released in May, unfurls with tracks that connect as compositions, not simply as mood pieces. Recorded in Kolkata, in West Bengal, and then tinkered with for several years, the record has an inky tonality with a distinct sense of play—the closer one listens, the better one hears this album's glistening, dark edge fade into crumbs, thanks to judiciously applied filtering.—*Michaelangelo Matos (Streaming on select platforms.)*

Hiro Kone

ELECTRONIC Though best known for germinal contributions to industrial music as a member of Throbbing Gristle and Psychic TV, the late electronic musician Genesis Breyer P-Orridge was also a multimedia visual artist. (P-Orridge died in March, 2020.) The posthumous exhibition "BREYER P-ORRIDGE: We Are but One," organized by Pioneer Works and running at the nearby Red Hook Labs through July 10, focusses on this meaningful component of the artist's work, and showcases the decades-spanning "Pandrogyne" project. A series of associated concerts, curated by Ryan Martin of Dais Records, features P-Orridge's friends, collaborators, and disciples. Among the performers at this installment are the producer and modular synthesist Hiro Kone, whose discomfiting soundscapes have put her

ILLUSTRATION BY ULI KNÖRZER

at the forefront of New York experimental techno; the conceptual artist James Hoff, a co-founder of the artist-book publishing house Primary Information; and Ov Stars, the duo of Shaune Pony Heath Thilberg and Alice Genese, a former member of Psychic TV.—*Jenn Pelly (Red Hook Labs; June 30.)*

Charles Lloyd: "Trios: Chapel"

JAZZ The saxophonist Charles Lloyd has had a thing for individualistic guitarists since the early days of his solo career, in the sixties; it was inevitable that he'd eventually encounter Bill Frisell, the most lyrical and characterful plectrist of his generation. On "Trios: Chapel," the first of three new recordings to be released featuring Lloyd alongside two other players, the octogenarian stylist teams up with Frisell and the bassist Thomas Morgan, with whom the guitarist has already fashioned a duo of superior subtlety and intuition. These seasoned partners bring all that to this memorable encounter, highlighted by a melting version of Billy Strayhorn's gorgeously wrought "Blood Count."—*Steve Futterman (Streaming on select platforms.)*

ART

"At the Dawn of a New Age"

Relish the abundance of relatively—and poignantly—dud paintings in this show of early-twentieth-century American modernism at the Whitney, organized by the curator Barbara Haskell. With an emphasis on abstraction, it features a number of rarely exhibited works (most owned by the museum), which were made during the learning-curve years—at full tilt by 1912—of artists in the U.S. who strove to absorb revolutionary innovations that had originated in Europe. Occupying the museum's eighth floor, the array provides a sidelight (or prequel) to the Whitney's long-running installation, one floor below, of touchstone pieces from its collection, which parades feats, dating from 1900 to 1965, by such American adepts as Edward Hopper, Alexander Calder, Jacob Lawrence, and Willem de Kooning. "At the Dawn" samples provincial talents who had plenty of moxie but remained shallowly rooted in the dashing radicality with which Europeans eclipsed embedded traditions. These aspiring Americans thrilled to the explosion but tended to be hazy on exactly what, in prior art history, was being blown up. But their frequent ingenuousness tantalizes. It is a fact of the art-loving experience that serious but failed ambitions teach more about the tenor of their times than contemporaneous successes, which freeze us in particular, awed fascination.—*Peter Schjeldahl (Whitney Museum; through Jan. 29.)*

"Kimono Style"

Traditionally constructed from a single bolt of fabric, the Japanese kimono, with its unmistakable T-shaped geometry, has endured for centuries, even as its meanings, uses, and proportions have shifted. This chronological exhibition is full of marvels from the Edo period, from the ornate brocades of Noh theatre costumes to the gold-embroidered crashing waves on a red wool firefighter's uniform (worn by a high-ranking samurai woman). Examples from later eras are no less fascinating and visually lively—and sometimes even more sumptuous. Fresh energy accompanies the early-twentieth-century advent of *meisen*, or ready-to-wear, kimonos, made from inexpensive silk with colorful prints, the result of new textile-production techniques and the international influence of abstract patterning and Art Deco motifs (which were themselves inspired by Asian imagery and woodblock printing). At the same time, avant-garde designers from the West, dressing the uncorseted modern woman, looked to the tried-and-true Japanese silhouette. The draped volume and slinky straight lines of dresses from the French fashion houses of Paul Poiret and Callot Souers make the point most eloquently here. And a 2018 polyester creation by Rei Kawakubo—a sweeping gown with Versailles volume and a Strawberry Shortcake palette, featuring a big-eyed manga character—provides over-the-top evidence of the kimono's infinite potential for excitement and elegance.—*Johanna Fateman (Metropolitan Museum of Art; through Feb. 20.)*

Malcolm Mooney

A 1969 album by the German experimental-rock band CAN lists Mooney as its "linguistic space communicator"—the American artist was the group's first vocalist—and he has approached his stage design, sculpture, printmaking, and painting with a similar countercultural futurism. Mooney's first solo exhibition in New York in more than a decade (and the adventurous gallery Ulrik's second show ever) focusses on Mooney's interest in the grid, by way of African textiles, in a small group of works made between 1970 and 1986. These vibrant geometric compositions were inspired by the colors and woven rhythms of kente cloth, as they might appear when enlarged under a microscope. The umber-and-gold "Package," from 1986, achieves a strange depth with racing diagonals and the titular beribboned gift, which seems to float above the picture's surface. "The Abyss," from 1974, uses a curtain of black paint to partially

IN THE MUSEUMS



LOUISE BOURGEOIS / COURTESY METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART / THE EASTON FOUNDATION / LICENSED BY VAGA AT ARS

There's more to **Louise Bourgeois** than stratospherically priced steel spiders. Although Bourgeois described herself as "a woman without secrets," an exhibition of her early, largely unknown oil paintings, at the Met through Aug. 7, is a canon-revising surprise. Bourgeois made thousands of drawings and prints before her death, in 2010, but only about a hundred paintings, all in the course of a decade, starting in 1939, when she arrived in Manhattan as a newlywed Parisian expat. About half of those canvases are on view at the Met, many being seen publicly for the first time in the first-ever show on the subject. (Kudos to the curator Clare Davies for taking the risk, and to the art historian Briony Fer for her insightful catalogue essay.) They're curious pictures, awkward but riveting, in a raw palette dominated by blood reds and melancholic blues, in contrarian conversation with both Surrealism (which Bourgeois disliked) and the burgeoning Ab Ex scene. Lifelong themes—motherhood, the psychic toll of domesticity, art as a pipeline to sanity—are established. So is Bourgeois's destiny as a sculptor, as seen in "Roof Song," from 1946-48 (above), a self-portrait of the artist keeping ecstatic company with her own three-dimensional work.—*Andrea K. Scott*

conceal a buoyantly layered abstraction, which is glimpsed beyond a ragged edge and a cutout in the canvas. Here, ever a space communicator, Mooney handily transforms the flatness of fabric.—*J.F. (Ulrik; through July 2.)*

MOVIES

Carol

One day in the nineteen-fifties, Carol Aird (Cate Blanchett) is shopping for Christmas presents at a department store in Manhattan. She comes across a salesgirl, Therese Belivet (Rooney Mara), and they fall in love, right there. Todd Haynes's 2015 film then follows the women as they meet for lunch, hang out at Carol's home, embark on an aimless journey, and go to bed—conscious, all the while, of what they are risking. Therese has a boyfriend (Jake Lacy), and Carol has a husband (Kyle Chandler) and a child, although her maternal instinct gets short dramatic shrift. That feels true to Patricia Highsmith, on whose 1952 novel, "The Price of Salt," the film is based. The fine screenplay is by Phyllis Nagy, who drains away the book's sourness; what remains is a production of clean and frictionless beauty, down to the last, strokable inch of clothing and skin. Yet Haynes and his stars, for all their stylish restraint, know that elegance alone will not suffice. Inside the showcase is a storm of feeling. With Sarah Paulson, as Carol's best friend.—*Anthony Lane (Streaming on Prime Video, Tubi, Pluto, and other services.)*

Center Stage

With this 1991 bio-pic of the Chinese silent-movie star Ruan Lingyu, the Hong Kong director Stanley Kwan reveals the political fault lines of the actress's intimate passions while radically revising the bio-pic form. Maggie Cheung plays Ruan, who rose to stardom in Shanghai, in the early nineteen-thirties, while supporting a dissolute ex-lover and having an affair with a rich and feckless businessman. After the Japanese occupation of Manchuria and bombing of Shanghai, Ruan appeared in confrontational political dramas—amid threats of censorship—and was targeted by scandal-mongering journalists; she died, in 1935, by suicide, at the age of twenty-four. Kwan unfolds Ruan's story with a glossy blend of romantic melancholy and social history; it's intercut with clips from Ruan's films, interviews with her now elderly real-life colleagues, discussions with his cast and crew about her life and times, and behind-the-scenes footage of his shoot. The self-aware drama moves at the hypnotic pace of an elusive dream, as in spectacularly staged musical scenes, set in a night club, that merge sinuous and languid dances with high-stakes emotional battles.—*Richard Brody (Streaming on Vudu, Prime Video, and other services.)*

Talk to Me

Don Cheadle brings sharp humor and deep passion to his portrayal of the Washington, D.C., disk jockey and talk-show host Petey Greene in this historically vital and acute bio-pic, from 2007, directed by Kasi Lemmons. The action begins with Petey in prison, in 1966, where he hones his skills on the public-address system and gets released with a bold ploy. He then pressures Dewey Hughes (Chiwetel Ejiofor), the only Black executive at a radio station catering to Black audiences, to hire him; with his political frankness, personal candor, and scathing wit, Petey becomes an instant celebrity. His political commitment, as well as his civic devotion, is severely tested in the aftermath of the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. Then, in the seventies, Dewey attempts to expand Petey's fan base to television, and to white viewers, putting their friendship—and Petey's sense of self—at risk. Lemmons incisively dramatizes the enormous media machinery that elides the painful experiences of Black Americans—and the high price of resistance to it. With Taraji P. Henson, as Petey's impulsive and insightful longtime partner.—*R.B. (Streaming on Google Play, Prime Video, and other services.)*

To Be or Not to Be

The uninhibited antic ferocity of Ernst Lubitsch's anti-Nazi comedy, which he began filming in November, 1941—a month before the attack on Pearl Harbor—evokes the shadow of impending war and the terror of its outbreak. The action is set in Warsaw, mainly after the German invasion of Poland, and is centered on a theatre troupe whose actors' skill in impersonating Nazis proves vitally useful to the Polish underground resistance. Like all of Lubitsch's comedies, this one, for all its politics, runs on sex. The company's connection to the resistance is launched by the troupe's leading lady, Maria Tura (Carole Lombard), and her dalliance with a young Polish pilot (Robert Stack). Her husband, the vain lead actor Joseph Tura (Jack Benny), fancies himself a great Hamlet—and the dalliance turns his grand soliloquy into a ribald joke. A poignant subplot involves the troupe's sole Jewish actor (Felix Bressart) and his lifelong dream of playing Shylock; and the movie's repeated, grimly sardonic references to concentration camps come as a horrific jolt. The film's high purpose propels Lubitsch to unsurpassed extremes of inventive audacity.—*R.B. (Streaming on the Criterion Channel and HBO Max.)*

ON THE BIG SCREEN

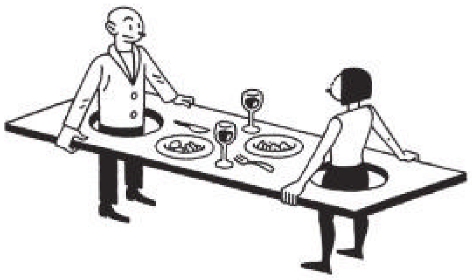


COURTESY JANUS FILMS

David Lynch's **"Lost Highway"**—a critical and commercial flop when it came out, in 1997, now screening in a new restoration at Film at Lincoln Center—may be the director's purest exercise of style, yet it's nonetheless a highly personal entry in his canon. The movie, which Lynch wrote with the novelist Barry Gifford, is a neo-noir—even a neo-neo-noir, because it blends the tropes and the tones of such classics as "Kiss Me Deadly" and "The Blue Gardenia" with the secondhand conceits of New Hollywood. It's an identity-shift story, in which a jazz musician (Bill Pullman), after ominous premonitions regarding his wife (Patricia Arquette), is convicted of her murder and then finds himself transformed into an auto mechanic (Balthazar Getty) who is seduced by the mistress (also Arquette) of a gangster (Robert Loggia) whose cars he repairs. Lynch brings the movie's febrile and violent artifice to life in visual compositions of a poised, painterly authority and interrupts them with quick bursts of hallucinatory frenzy. The movie's prime drama is metafictional—a display of the exhilarations and delusions of a life like the director's own, one spent reprising this genre's lurid tales, fashions, and images.—*Richard Brody*

For more reviews, visit
newyorker.com/goings-on-about-town





TABLES FOR TWO

Place des Fêtes

212 Greene Ave., Brooklyn

On the cusp of the summer solstice, it's hard to imagine looking forward to colder, darker months. And yet the other night at Place des Fêtes, a new wine bar and restaurant in Clinton Hill, the idea consoled me. A few weeks prior, I'd had a dish there that I was ready to declare the best of 2022. A skate wing had been quick-cured, cold-smoked, breaded in whipped egg whites and koji-rice flour, and deep-fried twice. The darkly bronzed exterior, dusted in dried lacto-fermented red pepper, looked tough but cracked easily at the nudge of a fork, peeling cleanly along the bone and revealing strips of sweet, succulent meat. Surrounding it were a wedge of Meyer lemon, a delicate pile of dill and Italian parsley, a tiny dish of sauce gribiche (mayo, boiled egg, Calabrian chili, pickled green garlic, bottarga, lemon), and, best of all, a warm buckwheat crêpe folded as elegantly as a pocket square and releasing the heavenly scent of toasted nuts. I was thrilled by the prospect of eating it again. My heart sank to see it absent from the menu. "The water's getting warmer," my server explained; the skate was sourced from Massachusetts.

While we wait for the water to cool (as long as climate change allows), there is plenty else to love here, and a sense that the kitchen—overseen by the chef and co-owner Nico Russell, known previously for Oxalis, in Crown Heights—can make magic with whatever the season, or the pantry, presents. Fingerling potatoes, grilled low and slow until their skins turned thick and crisp and separated from their velvety flesh, smacked of a campfire, except for a luscious green gloss of savory sabayon, a light custard usually served for dessert, made with ramps and skin-contact wine instead of the customary sweet Marsala. Spruce needles clung to dense wedges of refreshing Japanese cucumber. Segments of royal-red shrimp, as scarlet-tinged as their name suggests, were arranged like polka dots in a pool of salt-macerated gooseberries, each wearing a ring of knotweed, an invasive plant with crunchy hollow stems and a tart, rhubarb-like flavor.

A plate of four skinny Don Bocarte anchovy fillets in olive oil, imported from Spain, seemed so austere that I felt compelled to order bread (sourced from the nearby Otway Bakery) to compensate. But the anchovies were beguilingly unctuous, almost creamy, with a complex but subtle flavor that the excellent miche—made with malted rye, dense and dark—threatened to overpower.

Both anchovies and bread appear on a section of the menu entitled "salé/salted," which also offers cheeses and charcuterie, including a silky mortadella made by Tempesta, a salumi company in Chicago, and a funky aged country ham from Kentucky. All of these are treated with no less care for their unadorned simplicity; the other night, I watched as a chef brought a plate of ham to room temperature under a heat lamp, which spotlighted his cleaver tattoo.

Place des Fêtes, the name of a plaza in the Nineteenth Arrondissement of Paris, translates to "party square." Place des Fêtes in Brooklyn, with its buttery leather stools and whitewashed brick walls, would be perfect for a first date. Bottles of wine, mostly Spanish, are kept in a festively enormous silver bucket full of ice at the end of the bar, but they encourage conversation more than revelry: a pét-nat from Castilla y León, for instance, smelled startlingly herbal and tasted of blood orange.

Even the cocktails make you think. The excellent house Martini, cold and smoothly viscous, is made with tomato liqueur, sherry, vermouth, and a local carbon-negative vodka called Good that's distilled from discarded coffee fruit. And my favorite was the lowest A.B.V., the Vermut and Soda, which features a vermouth from the Basque country and which the bartender accurately described as "almost like a Dr. Pepper," though it's not nearly as sweet, and imparts the barest impression of smoke. *(Dishes $8-$35.)*

—*Hannah Goldfield*

PHOTOGRAPH BY MENGWEN CAO FOR THE NEW YORKER; ILLUSTRATION BY JOOST SWARTE

Pitchfork MUSIC FESTIVAL

JULY 15-17 *at* UNION PARK *in* Chicago

Friday

The National / Spiritualized / Parquet Courts
Tierra Whack / Amber Mark / Dawn Richard
Tkay Maidza / Indigo De Souza
SPIRIT OF THE BEEHIVE / SPELLLING
Camp Cope / Wiki / Ethel Cain / Arooj Aftab

Saturday

Mitski / Japanese Breakfast / Lucy Dacus
Low / Magdalena Bay / Dry Cleaning / Karate
Iceage / yeule / Arooj Aftab / The Armed
The Linda Lindas / Hyd
Jeff Parker & the New Breed / CupcakKe

Sunday

The Roots / Toro y Moi / Earl Sweatshirt
Noname / BADBADNOTGOOD / Cate Le Bon / Tirzah
Xenia Rubinos / Erika de Casier / Injury Reserve
KAINA / L'Rain / Sofia Kourtesis / Pink Siifu

Visit **PITCHFORKMUSICFESTIVAL.COM**



THE TALK OF THE TOWN

COMMENT
THE POST-ROE ERA

In the weeks since a draft of the Supreme Court's decision in Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization—a case about a Mississippi law that bans abortion after fifteen weeks, with some health-related exceptions but none for rape or incest—was leaked, a slogan has been revived: "We won't go back." It has been chanted at marches, defiantly but also somewhat awkwardly, given that this is plainly an era of repression and regression, in which abortion rights are not the only rights disappearing. Now that the Supreme Court has issued its final decision, overturning Roe v. Wade and removing the constitutional right to abortion, insuring that abortion will become illegal or highly restricted in twenty states, the slogan sounds almost divorced from reality—an indication, perhaps, of how difficult it has become to comprehend the power and the right-wing extremism of the current Supreme Court.

Support for abortion has never been higher, with more than two-thirds of Americans in favor of retaining Roe, and fifty-seven per cent affirming a woman's right to abortion for any reason. Even so, there are Republican officials who have made it clear that they will attempt to pass a federal ban on abortion if and when they control both chambers of Congress and the Presidency. Anyone who can get pregnant must now face the reality that half of the country is in the hands of legislators who believe that your personhood and autonomy are conditional—who believe that, if you are impregnated by another person, under any circumstance, you have a legal and moral duty to undergo pregnancy, delivery, and, in all likelihood, two decades or more of caregiving, no matter the permanent and potentially devastating consequences for your body, your heart, your mind, your family, your ability to put food on the table, your plans, your aspirations, your life.

"We won't go back"—it's an inadequate rallying cry, prompted only by events that belie its message. But it is true in at least one sense. The future that we now inhabit will not resemble the past before Roe, when women sought out illegal abortions and not infrequently found death. The principal danger now lies elsewhere, and arguably reaches further. We have entered an era not of unsafe abortion but of widespread state surveillance and criminalization—of pregnant women, certainly, but also of doctors and pharmacists and clinic staffers and volunteers and friends and family members, of anyone who comes into meaningful contact with a pregnancy that does not end in a healthy birth. Those who argue that this decision won't actually change things much—an instinct you'll find on both sides of the political divide—are blind to the ways in which state-level anti-abortion crusades have already turned pregnancy into punishment, and the ways in which the situation is poised to become much worse.

In the states where abortion has been or will soon be banned, any pregnancy loss past an early cutoff can now potentially be investigated as a crime. Search histories, browsing histories, text messages, location data, payment data, information from period-tracking apps—prosecutors can examine all of it if they believe that the loss of a pregnancy may have been deliberate. Even if prosecutors fail to prove that an abortion took place, those who are investigated will be punished by the process, liable for whatever might be found.

Five years ago, Latice Fisher, a Black mother of three from Mississippi, who made eleven dollars an hour as a police-radio operator, experienced a stillbirth, at roughly thirty-six weeks, at home. When questioned, she acknowledged that she didn't want more kids and couldn't afford to take care of more kids. She surrendered her phone to investigators, who scraped it for search data and found search terms regarding mifepristone and misoprostol, i.e., abortion pills.

These pills are among the reasons that we are not going back to the era of coat hangers. They can be prescribed via telemedicine and delivered via mail; allowing for the prescription of an extra dose, they are ninety-five to ninety-eight per cent effective in cases of pregnancy up to eleven weeks, which account for almost ninety per cent of all abortions in the U.S. Already, more than half of all abortions in the country are medication abortions. In nineteen states, doctors are prohibited from providing abortions via telemedicine, but women can seek help from clinicians in other states and abroad, such as Rebecca Gomperts, who leads Aid Access, an organization based in Austria that is openly providing abortion pills to women in prohibition states, and has been safely mailing abortion pills to pregnant people all over the world since 2005, with the organization Women

ILLUSTRATIONS BY JOÃO FAZENDA

on Web. In advance of the U.S. bans, Gomperts has been promoting advance prescription: sympathetic doctors might prescribe abortion pills for any menstruating person, removing some of the fears—and, possibly, the traceability—that would come with attempting to get the pills after pregnancy. Misoprostol can be prescribed for other issues, such as stomach ulcers, and Gomperts argues that there is no reasonable medical argument against advance prescription. "If you buy bleach in the supermarket, that's more dangerous," she has said.

There was no evidence that Latice Fisher took an abortion pill. She maintained that she had experienced a stillbirth—an occurrence in one out of every hundred and sixty pregnancies in the U.S. Nonetheless, she was charged with second-degree murder and held for several weeks on a hundred-thousand-dollar bond. The district attorney, Scott Colom, had campaigned as a progressive reformer; advocates pushed him to drop the murder charge, and to provide a new grand jury with information about an antiquated, unreliable "float test" that had been used as a basis for the allegation that Fisher's baby was born alive. The grand jury declined to indict Fisher again; the ordeal took more than three years.

Even if it remains possible in prohibition states to order abortion pills, doing so will be unlawful. (Missouri recently proposed classifying the delivery or shipment of these pills as drug trafficking. Louisiana just passed a law that makes mailing abortion pills to a resident of the state a criminal offense, punishable by six months' imprisonment.) In many states, to avoid breaking the law, a woman would have to drive to a state where abortion is legal, have a telemedicine consultation there, and then receive the pills in that state. Many women in Texas have opted for a riskier but easier option: to drive across the border, to Mexico, and get abortion pills from unregulated pharmacies, where pharmacists may issue incorrect advice for usage. Some women who lack the freedom and money to travel out of state, and who might fear the consequences of seeking a clinical confirmation of their gestational stage, will order abortion pills without a clear understanding of how far along they are in pregnancy. Abortion pills are safe and effective, but patients need access to clinical guidance and follow-up care. Women in prohibition states who want to seek medical attention after a self-managed abortion will, as a rule, have to choose between risking their freedom and risking their health.

Both abortion and miscarriage currently occur more than a million times each year in America, and the two events are often clinically indistinguishable. Because of this, prohibition states will have a profoundly invasive interest in differentiating between them. Some have already laid the groundwork for establishing government databases of pregnant women likely to seek abortions. Last year, Arkansas passed a law called the Every Mom Matters Act, which requires women considering abortion to call a state hotline and requires abortion providers to register all patients in a database with a unique I.D. Since then, six other states have implemented or proposed similar laws. The hotlines are provided by crisis pregnancy centers: typically Christian organizations, many of which masquerade as abortion clinics, provide no health care, and passionately counsel women against abortion. Crisis pregnancy centers are already three times as numerous as abortion clinics in the U.S., and, unlike hospitals, they are not required to protect the privacy of those who come to them. For years, conservative states have been redirecting money, often from funds earmarked for poor women and children, toward these organizations. The data that crisis pregnancy centers are capable of collecting—names, locations, family details, sexual and medical histories, non-diagnostic ultrasound images—can now be deployed against those who seek their help.

If you become pregnant, your phone generally knows before many of your friends do. The entire Internet economy is built on meticulous user tracking of purchases and search terms. Laws modelled on Texas's S.B. 8, which encourages private citizens to file lawsuits against anyone who facilitates an abortion, will proliferate, giving self-appointed vigilantes no shortage of tools to track and identify suspects. (The National Right to Life Committee recently published policy recommendations for anti-abortion states that included criminal penalties for anyone who provides information about self-managed abortion "over the telephone, the internet, or any other medium of communication.") A reporter for Vice recently spent a mere hundred and sixty dollars to purchase a data set on visits to more than six hundred Planned Parenthood clinics. Brokers sell data that make it possible to track journeys to and from any location—say, an abortion clinic in another state. In Missouri, this year, a lawmaker proposed a measure that would allow private citizens to sue anyone who helps a resident of the state get an abortion elsewhere; as with S.B. 8, the law would reward successful plaintiffs with ten thousand dollars. The closest analogue to this kind of legislation is the Fugitive Slave Act of 1793.

For now, the targets of S.B. 8-type bounty laws are those who provide abortions, not those who seek them. But that seems likely to change. Connecticut, a progressive state on the matter of abortion, recently passed a law that prevents local agencies from coöperating with out-of-state abortion prosecutions and protects the medical records of out-of-state clients. Other progressive states will follow suit. If prohibition states can't sue out-of-state doctors, and, if abortion pills sent by mail remain largely undetectable, the only people left to target will be abortion advocates and those trying to get abortions. The Stream, a conservative Christian publication, recently advocated mandatory psychiatric custody for women who get abortions. In May, Louisiana advanced a bill that would allow abortion patients to be charged with murder. The proposal was withdrawn, but the threat had been made.

The theological concept of fetal personhood—the idea that, from the moment of conception, an embryo or fetus is a full human being, deserving of equal (or, more accurately, superior) rights—is a foundational doctrine of the anti-abortion movement. The legal ramifications of this idea—including the possible classification of I.V.F., IUDs, and the morning-after pill as instruments of murder—are unhinged, and much harsher than what even the average anti-abortion American is currently willing to embrace. Nonetheless, the anti-abortion movement is now openly pushing for fetal personhood to become

the foundation of U.S. abortion law.

If a fetus is a person, then a legal framework can be invented to require someone who has one living inside her to do everything in her power to protect it, including—as happened to Savita Halappanavar, in Ireland, which operated under a fetal-personhood doctrine until 2018, and to Izabela Sajbor, in Poland, where all abortion is effectively illegal—to die. No other such obligation exists anywhere in our society, which grants cops the freedom to stand by as children are murdered behind an unlocked door. In Poland, pregnant women with cancer have been routinely denied chemotherapy because of clinicians' fears of harming the fetus.

Fetal-personhood laws have passed in Georgia and Alabama, and they are no longer likely to be found unconstitutional. Such laws justify a full-scale criminalization of pregnancy, whereby women can be arrested, detained, and otherwise placed under state intervention for taking actions perceived to be potentially harmful to a fetus. This approach has been steadily tested, on low-income minorities in particular, for the past four decades. National Advocates for Pregnant Women—the organization that has provided legal defense for most of the cases mentioned in this article—has documented almost eighteen hundred cases, from 1973 to 2020, of prosecutions or forced interventions related to pregnancy; this is likely a substantial undercount. Even in states such as California, where the law explicitly prohibits charging women with murder after a pregnancy loss, conservative prosecutors are doing so anyway.

Most pregnancy-related prosecutions, so far, have revolved around drug use. Women who used drugs while pregnant, or sought treatment for drug use during pregnancy, have been charged with child abuse, child neglect, distribution of drugs to a minor, assault with a deadly weapon, manslaughter, and homicide. In 2020, law enforcement in Alabama investigated a woman named Kim Blalock for chemical endangerment of a child after she told delivery-room staff that she had been taking prescribed hydrocodone for pain management. (The district attorney charged her with prescription fraud—a felony—before eventually dropping the prosecution altogether.) There has been a string of shocking recent prosecutions in Oklahoma, in which women who used drugs have been charged with manslaughter for miscarrying well before the point of viability. In Wisconsin, state law already allows juvenile courts to take a fetus—meaning a pregnant woman—into custody for the fetus's protection, resulting in the detention and forced treatment of more than four hundred pregnant women every year on the suspicion that they may be consuming controlled substances. A proposed law in Wyoming would create a specific category of felony child endangerment for drug use while pregnant, a law that resembles Tennessee's former Fetal Assault Law. The Tennessee law was discontinued after two years, be-



cause treating women as adversaries to the fetuses they carry has a chilling effect on prenatal medicine, and inevitably results in an increase in maternal and infant death.

The mainstream pro-choice movement has largely ignored the growing criminalization of pregnancy, just as it has generally ignored the inadequacy of Roe. (It took Joe Biden, who campaigned on making Roe the "law of the land," more than a year to say the word "abortion" on the record after he became President; the Democrats, given the chance to override the filibuster and codify Roe in May, predictably failed to do so.) Many of those who support the right to abortion have tacitly accepted that poor and minority women in conservative states lost access to abortion long before this Supreme Court decision, and have quietly hoped that the thousands of women facing arrest after pregnancy, miscarriage, stillbirth, or even healthy deliveries were unfortunate outliers. They were not outliers, and, as the columnist Rebecca Traister noted last month, the chasm between the impervious class and everyone else is growing every day.

Pregnancy is more than thirty times more dangerous than abortion. One study estimates that a nationwide ban would lead to a twenty-one-per-cent rise in pregnancy-related deaths. Some of the women who will die from abortion bans are pregnant right now. Their deaths will come not from back-alley procedures but from a silent denial of care: interventions delayed, desires disregarded. They will die of infections, of preëclampsia, of hemorrhage, as they are forced to submit their bodies to pregnancies that they never wanted to carry, and it will not be hard for the anti-abortion movement to accept these deaths as a tragic, even noble, consequence of womanhood itself.

In the meantime, abortion bans will hurt, disable, and endanger many people who want to carry their pregnancies to term but who encounter medical difficulties. Physicians in prohibition states have already begun declining to treat women who are in the midst of miscarriages, for fear that the treatment could be classified as abortion. One woman in Texas was told that she had to drive fifteen hours to New Mexico to have her ectopic pregnancy—which is nonviable, by definition, and always dangerous to the mother—removed. Misoprostol, one of the abortion pills, is routinely prescribed for miscarriage management, because it causes the uterus to expel any remaining tissue. Pharmacists in Texas, fearing legal liability, have already refused to prescribe it. If a miscarriage is not managed to a safe completion, women risk—among other things, and taking the emotional damage for granted—uterine perforation, organ failure, infection, infertility, and death.

Most miscarriages are caused by factors beyond a pregnant person's control: illnesses, placental or uterine irregularities, genetic abnormalities. But the treatment of pregnant people in this country

already makes many of them feel directly and solely responsible for the survival of their fetus. They are told to absolutely avoid alcohol, coffee, retinol, deli turkey, unpasteurized cheese, hot baths, vigorous exercise, drugs that are not prescribed to them, drugs that they have been prescribed for years—often without any explanation of the frequently shoddy reasoning behind these prohibitions. Structural factors that clearly increase the likelihood of miscarriage—poverty, environmental-chemical exposure, working night shifts—are less likely to come up. As fetal personhood becomes law in more of the land, pregnant people, as Lynn Paltrow, the director of National Advocates for Pregnant Women, has pointed out, "could be sued, or prevented from engaging in travel, work, or any activity that is believed to create a risk to the life of the unborn."

Half a century ago, the anti-abortion movement was dominated by progressive, antiwar, pro-welfare Catholics. Today, the movement is conservative, evangelical, and absolutely single-minded, populated overwhelmingly by people who, although they may embrace foster care, adoption, and various forms of private ministry, show no interest in pushing for public, structural support for human life once it's left the womb. The scholar Mary Ziegler recently noted that today's anti-abortion advocates see the "strategies of earlier decades as apologetic, cowardly, and counterproductive." During the past four years, eleven states have passed abortion bans that contain no exceptions for rape or incest, a previously unthinkable extreme.

In Texas, already, children aged nine, ten, and eleven, who don't yet understand what sex and abuse are, face forced pregnancy and childbirth after being raped. Women sitting in emergency rooms in the midst of miscarriages are being denied treatment for sepsis because their fetuses' hearts haven't yet stopped. People you'll never hear of will spend the rest of their lives trying and failing, agonizingly, in this punitive country, to provide stability for a first or fifth child they knew they weren't equipped to care for.

In the face of all this, there has been so much squeamishness, even in the pro-choice camp: a tone that casts abortion as an unfortunate necessity; an approach to messaging which values choice but devalues abortion care itself, which emphasizes reproductive rights rather than reproductive justice. That approach has landed us here. We are not going back to the pre-Roe era, and we should not want to go back to the era that succeeded it, which was less bitter than the present but was never good enough. We should demand more, and we will have to. We will need to be full-throated and unconditional about abortion as a necessary precondition to justice and equal rights if we want even a chance of someday getting somewhere better.

—*Jia Tolentino*

CURATION DEPT.
CRAZY TOWN



The right-wing media ecosystem is sometimes described as a perpetual outrage machine (headlines on a recent day included "THE LEFT'S GRAND PLAN TO DESTROY OUR COUNTRY" and "ELON MUSK IS THE BOSS ALL WOKE LOSERS NEED"), but that doesn't mean there aren't occasional droughts. Last Monday morning, as Howard Polskin began prowling right-wing Web sites in search of material for *TheRighting*, the newsletter he founded to provide a daily roundup of the conservative commentariat, he looked worried. The previous week, the hearings into the January 6th attack on the Capitol had elicited a steady stream of headlines that were provocative enough to serve as the newsletter's subject line ("THE J6 COMMITTEE'S REAL TARGET IS YOU"). But a weekend break had raised the possibility of an unlikely lull. Ordinarily, Polskin waits until 10 A.M. to allow himself a stick of gum, but this morning he was nervously chewing by nine. "We'll have another in the afternoon, maybe two, if it's a bad day," he said.

Polskin, who is seventy-one, with bright-green eyes and a bushy mustache, was sitting at the dining-room table in his beachfront co-op, in Boca Raton. He worked from a handwritten list of fifty conservative outlets, which he peruses each day. He chooses articles for many reasons, but a big factor is having a grabby headline. He sends the top seventeen to his newsletter subscribers—a few thousand that includes people in academia and the media, plus a smattering of political staffers. "I'm looking at what's going to reveal the heart and soul of the right," he said. He tries to offer a full spectrum of conservative politics, in curated form. "So you get crazy shit like 'JUSTIN TRUDEAU: FIDEL CASTRO'S SON.' But then you also get the *Wall Street Journal* saying freedom isn't quite dead."

Polskin has been in the media industry—reporter at local paper in New Jersey, P.R. for CNN—for forty-eight years. He created *TheRighting* after the 2016 election. "Something happened in this country that led to the election of Donald Trump," he said. "I don't like it, but I think it's got to be understood more." Subscriptions are free. A grant from the Ford Foundation pays occasional freelancers. He is driven more by curiosity than by profit, which is zero; for a week last summer, he stood on a street corner tallying whether people wore masks, simply to satisfy his own interest.

In addition to the newsletter, he tracks Web traffic to conservative sites and writes trend articles. He thinks that Breitbart and Infowars are losing their edge; they used to be Polskin's most consistent source of headlines. "Not so much anymore," he said. "It's just not as interesting." Lately, he has been more likely to cite the Daily Caller ("PRONOUN POLICE ATTEMPT ANOTHER ARREST"); WND ("IT'S NOT A GUN CRISIS—IT'S A SPIRITUAL CRISIS"); or NOQ Report ("BILL GATES LAYS OUT PLAN FOR GLOBAL TAKEOVER").

What about the response to the January 6th hearings? Polskin broke the coverage down into three camps. There's the predictable fare, deriding the proceedings as political hackery. "Then there's stuff that's far more, you know, going toward crazy town." (He cited Tucker Carlson.) But, he added, "I'm seeing an increase in some anti-Trump stories, and I actually started creating a file on that."

Polskin's liberal friends sometimes worry that he spends too much time

behind enemy lines. "The knee-jerk reaction, to the mainstreamers and liberals, is that everything coming out from the right is poison," he said. "Does it take a toll on a doctor at the C.D.C. studying the coronavirus when he looks under a microscope? No. I have a clinical detachment to it. It's like I'm an explorer in a new land." Still, he's concerned about growing numb to poisonous language, such as the comparison of Anthony Fauci to Josef Mengele.

He turned back to the headline search. The day's batch was particularly weak. Two were so unclear that he had to paraphrase. A Bill O'Reilly headline about voters' anger with Joe Biden ("IT'S A MAD, MAD, MAD, MAD WORLD") became "BILL O'REILLY: BIDEN MAY RESIGN FOR HEALTH REASONS."

Polskin also chose a few that were more straightforward: "DEMS START TO PREP AMERICA FOR THEIR MIDTERM STEAL" ("So irresponsible," he said); "THE DEFINITIVE PROOF THAT CRITICAL RACE THEORY IS BEING TAUGHT IN OUR SCHOOLS" ("Kind of an evergreen"); and "IT SEEMS BLACK AMERICANS MISS TRUMP."

But he still hadn't found a headline worthy of the newsletter's subject line. After nearly an hour of searching, one caught his eye: "JANUARY 6 WAS NOT A COUP." It was from *The American Conservative*, which Polskin did not consider to be part of "crazy town." It was short, punchy, simple. "Any reasonable person would conclude that there was a coup," he said. "And here we have a fairly respectable conservative publication saying it was *not* a coup. And I love the line 'To stage a coup, you need tanks on the White House lawn.'" He looked relieved. "It ticks a lot of boxes," he said.

—*Bill Adair*

IN MINIATURE
SHELL GAME



Twelve years ago, the filmmaker Dean Fleischer Camp and the actress Jenny Slate, who were dating, went to a destination wedding. Their teeny hotel room, shared with five friends, was preposterously cramped, and Slate began to complain about the sardine-like conditions in a small, squeaky voice. She spontaneously named this voice Marcel; she claimed it belonged to a seashell so itsy-bitsy that it used a muffin as a mattress. When the pair returned home to New York, Slate couldn't stop speaking as Marcel or inventing details about his life, such as the fact that he kept a piece of lint as a dog or used discarded human toenails as skis. When Camp was hired to shoot a short video for a comedy show, he bought a bag of googly-eyes, an off-brand Polly Pocket doll (for the shoes), and a one-inch-tall, pearlescent hermit-crab shell. The resulting short stop-motion film, "Marcel the Shell with Shoes On," was a viral hit on YouTube. Hollywood offers rolled in, but most of them didn't feel right.

"One studio recommended that we partner him with Ryan Reynolds and they fight crime," Camp said the other day, while sitting in the café at the Museum of the City of New York, in East Harlem. "I probably would watch that movie on an airplane, but no." Camp was at the museum to see the Stettheimer Dollhouse, another laborious study in miniatures. He was wearing a navy patterned button-down and wire-framed spectacles. He had a nice Friday planned. Later, he was going to meet his girlfriend and his parents at the Grand Central Oyster Bar.

Slate and Camp ended up spending seven years working on the "Marcel" feature film, which premièred last week. During that span, they got married and then un-married. "When we were getting divorced and still working on this, I think our friends were, like, 'That seems very weird,'" Camp said. The film follows Marcel as he scuttles around a house populated by a rotating crop of Airbnb guests. He's a lonesome shell; a former tenant had inadvertently kidnapped his friends and family while emptying a sock drawer. Marcel recounts this woeful tale to Camp (playing himself), who is renting the house after a relationship meltdown. "We wrote the story before we separated," Camp said. "But I kind of always find that things that I make tell the future."

He headed into the exhibition hall. The doll house—a twelve-room, Gilded Age mini-manse—was the creation of Carrie Walter Stettheimer, a Manhattan socialite. (Her sister Florine was a celebrated painter.) She began the project in 1916, and it took over her life for the next two decades.

Peering inside the chinoiserie sitting room—wee mah-jongg set, shelves of books micro-inscribed with authors' names—Camp let out a delighted gasp. "My main feelings about working in miniature are that I have ham hocks for fingers," he said. He lingered on the kitchen scene, which featured a plate of diminutive pears distressed to look as if they had just begun to rot. "It's so impressive when you see patina," he said. "It's a constant thing with Marcel, because he's not supposed to have anything that's new."

Camp wanted Marcel's world to be invented entirely of human detritus. He climbs walls by dipping his feet into honey. He uses a spoon as a catapult, a Tootsie Roll wrapper as a parachute, and a stand mixer tied to a string to shake fruit loose from tree branches. For exercise, he ice-skates on a dusty coffee table. Camp pointed out a bannister inside the Stettheimer house which appeared to be made of pint-size toilet plungers. "That looks Marcel-y," he said. "Like, repurposed garbage from the human world made into other things."

Camp turned the corner and his eyes grew wide at the sight of a miniature art gallery inside the doll house, featuring original vest-pocket works by some of Stettheimer's artist pals—Marcel Duchamp, Gaston Lachaise. "Probably the pleasure of making this was researching all these things with her art friends," Camp said. He looked wistful.

Talk turned back to Slate. "It's very easy for us to slip back into collaborator mode," he said. "We met working together, we made tons of stuff before we started dating a million years ago, and we continue to make stuff today."

Oysters beckoned. Camp made for the exit. As he left, he said, "I want kids to go home and feel like they could find Marcel behind a pillow—like, it should feel that real. And part of that was about making sure it was real for us, too."

—*Rachel Syme*

ANNALS OF NATURE

SWAMPED

Why America's wetlands matter.

BY ANNIE PROULX



The U.S. once held a wealth of wetness, but the country's treasury has shrivelled.

It can be hell finding one's way across an extensive boggy moor—the partially dry, rough ground and the absence of any landmarks let the eye rove helplessly into the monotype distance. Everything undulates, the rise and fall share the same muted palette, and the senses dull. But a swamp is different: in it, in addition to water, there are trees and shrubs, just as reeds and rushes are the hallmarks of a marsh. Although water and squelch are everywhere in a swamp, there are landmarks—downed trees or jagged stumps, a tenanted heron nest, occasional islands of high-ground hardwood stands, called "hammocks" in the South. Yet the swamp traveller goes not in a straight line but slouches from quaking island to thick tussock to slippery, half-submerged log. Even with G.P.S. technology, big swamps are places to get lost, and in the past many people with a reason to melt out of sight—Native Americans threatened out of their territory, runaway slaves, Civil War army deserters, moonshiners, and bloody-handed murderers—have hidden in them. For a few seconds, I once considered hiding in a swamp myself.

When I was ten years old, my family lived in a rented house in Rhode Island. Saturdays were free time, and I sometimes went to a nearby swamp. A fishermen's path circled the swamp. Far out in the water stood the unreachable hulk of a dead tree—branchless, tall, white, and with a large hole near the top. I had somewhere read that great blue herons nested in such snags, and that in one swamp a man had brought a ladder, placed it against a tree, and climbed up to look into a heron nest. The heron stabbed him in the eye as he came level with the nest, and the man, his eye and brain pierced, fell dead from the ladder. I wanted to see if there was a heron nest in this local swamp's dead tree—perhaps even a live heron, perhaps even the remains of a ladder, perhaps even a sun-bleached skull nearby. When I got to the swamp, I saw a small raft and a pole lying on the bank. There was no one around. I pushed the raft out into the tawny water, got on board, and began poling toward the snag. I was halfway there when I heard furious shouts and screams. Looking back, I saw the two worst boys at my school jumping up and down on the bank and hurling futile clods of mud. I had stolen their raft. After a quick look for a hiding place, I changed direction and took an oblique route to the farthest shore, where I pole-vaulted onto firm land, found the path, and rushed away from the scene of the crime. It was some time before I noticed that I was still carrying the raft pole, and I leaned it helpfully against a tree before continuing home.

Many modern Americans do not like swamps, herons or no herons, and experience discomfort, irritation, bewilderment, and frustration when coaxed or forced into one, except for a few, like my mother, for whom entering a swamp was like plunging into a complex world of rare novelties. My mother's hero was Henry David Thoreau, the enigmatic New England surveyor-naturalist-essayist. Thoreau has been called the patron saint of swamps, because in them he found the deepest kind of beauty and interest. He wrote of his fondness for swamps throughout his life, most feelingly in his essay "Walking": "Yes, though you may think me perverse, if it were proposed to me to dwell in the neighborhood of the most beautiful garden that ever human art contrived, or else of a Dismal Swamp, I should certainly decide for the swamp." He went so far as to describe his dream house as one with windows fronting on a swamp where he could see "the high blue-

 ILLUSTRATION BY CARSON ELLIS

berry, panicled andromeda, lambkill, azalea, and rhodora—all standing in the quaking sphagnum."

Many people vaguely understand that wetlands cleanse the earth. In fact, they are carbon sinks that absorb CO_2, and they are unparalleled in filtering out human waste, material from rotten carcasses, chemicals, and other pollutants. They recharge underground aquifers and sustain regional water resources, buffering the excesses of drought and flood. In aggregate, the watery parts of the earth stabilize its climate.

Wooded swamps are at the end stage of a fen-bog-swamp succession, legacies of the Ice Age, when the melt started the sequence by first creating stupendously huge lakes. Lake Agassiz covered more than a hundred thousand square miles of Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario, North Dakota, and Minnesota. Lake Missoula covered about three thousand square miles of what is now Montana; its repeatedly bursting ice dams and cataclysmic floods spread through Idaho and Washington and created bizarre giant ripples as the long-ago gushers scoured out the channelled scablands of eastern Washington. The melt turned much of the North American continent into wet ground, with long chains of swamps gouged by no-brakes glaciers that plowed across the terrain. Burly new watercourses captured smaller streams and made deltas and estuaries.

In the nineteenth century, the United States enlarged in a fever of land acquisition: the 1803 Louisiana Purchase, involving eight hundred thousand square miles from the Gulf of Mexico to Canada, doubled the size of the country; in 1819, the Adams-Onís Treaty added Florida and part of Oregon; five hundred and twenty-five thousand square miles of Texas were annexed in 1845; the Oregon Treaty, in 1846, enrolled the Pacific Northwest from Northern California to the Strait of Juan de Fuca. Great oceans and lakes framed the country, and the interior roiled with tangles of rivers like unspooling silver ribbons. All that territory had once held a wealth of wetness—scientists have estimated that approximately two hundred and twenty-one million sopping acres existed in the early seventeenth century, much of it swamps—and two hundred years later many swamplands remained. As the United States pushed its borders, its population leaped from 7.2 million people in 1810 to 12.8 million by 1830, almost doubling in twenty years. The welcoming arms of open immigration became the hallmark of America, and that reputation lingers in global memory, despite today's more painfully stringent reality.

The original occupants of the continent knew the rivers and swamps, the bogs and lakes, as they knew the terrain and one another. But for most English settlers and European newcomers nature consisted of passive and inanimate substances and situations waiting to be used to human advantage. Preservation and care of nature were not what they had come for.

The first generations of overseas settlers concentrated on claiming the easiest farmland near the shore and in the river valleys. To their mind, there were no local resources. Everything had to be imported or reinvented. As invaders, they had constant battle with Indigenous people who defied them. It was not until the Revolutionary War ended and the Indian Wars devolved into treaty-making that the population noticeably increased and a need for more farmland brought settlers into the upland forests. The growing scarcity of good farmland revived old stories of swamp and marsh drainage. Farmers already knew that a wagonload of "muck" from a nearby swamp would enrich the soil, renewing yields that had weakened over the years. In addition, during the Civil War, moving heavy guns and personnel through swamps was incredibly difficult; soldiers often resorted to laboriously clearing bypass routes. One of the men wrote of wading through knee-deep and deeper mud in North Carolina after the battle of First Gum Swamp: "The brambles [were] thick and thorny, the water coffee-colored, alive with creeping things, the air heavy with moisture and foul odors." These memories persisted. Across the country, the ongoing stories of vile adventures in the muck made it clear to military, government, and citizenry that something had to be done about the swamps so universally detested. Everywhere there were horrendous mixtures of fen, bog, swamp, river, pond, lake, and human frustration. This was a country of rich, absorbent wetlands that increasingly no one wanted.

After a rainstorm, any curious child who drags a stick obliquely away from a rivulet sees the rivulet forsake its original channel and follow the stick's trail; the stick dragger has discovered the principle of drainage. It is this innate existential curiosity that has led humans to commit unthinking malfeasances against the natural world. Farmers grew up with shovel in hand ready to cut drainage ditches. The government was solidly on the side of drainage to increase land area, in part for incoming immigrants. In 1849, Congress passed the first of several swampland laws that turned federal wetlands over to the individual states with the right to dispense those water-sodden acreages for purposes of drainage. These laws perpetuated the myth of endless land free for the taking, and showed an inability or an unwillingness to observe changes in nature over the seasons and years.

By the nineteen-eighties, roughly half of America's wetlands had been wiped out. Aerial photography made wetland size estimates possible, and in 1990 the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service published a study showing that since the sixteen-hundreds the country's treasury of wetlands had shrivelled to a hundred and three million acres, and that some states had lost almost all their original wetlands.

The single-minded desire for more agricultural land linked to automation and the transfer of field labor from human to machine, along with the growing customer base of non-farming populations for cheap foods and grains, has come with a terrible cost. Between 2004 and 2009, another sixty-two thousand three hundred acres of wetlands disappeared to agricultural interests and housing developers. And more continue to disappear because of sediment-deposition patterns; fertilizer runoff; spilled and leaking chemicals; increasing floods, storms, droughts, and fires; and today's rising sea level.

Rising sea level is both subtle and blatant: we hardly notice it until a storm brings vast flooding. For example, at Naval Station Norfolk, in the Hampton

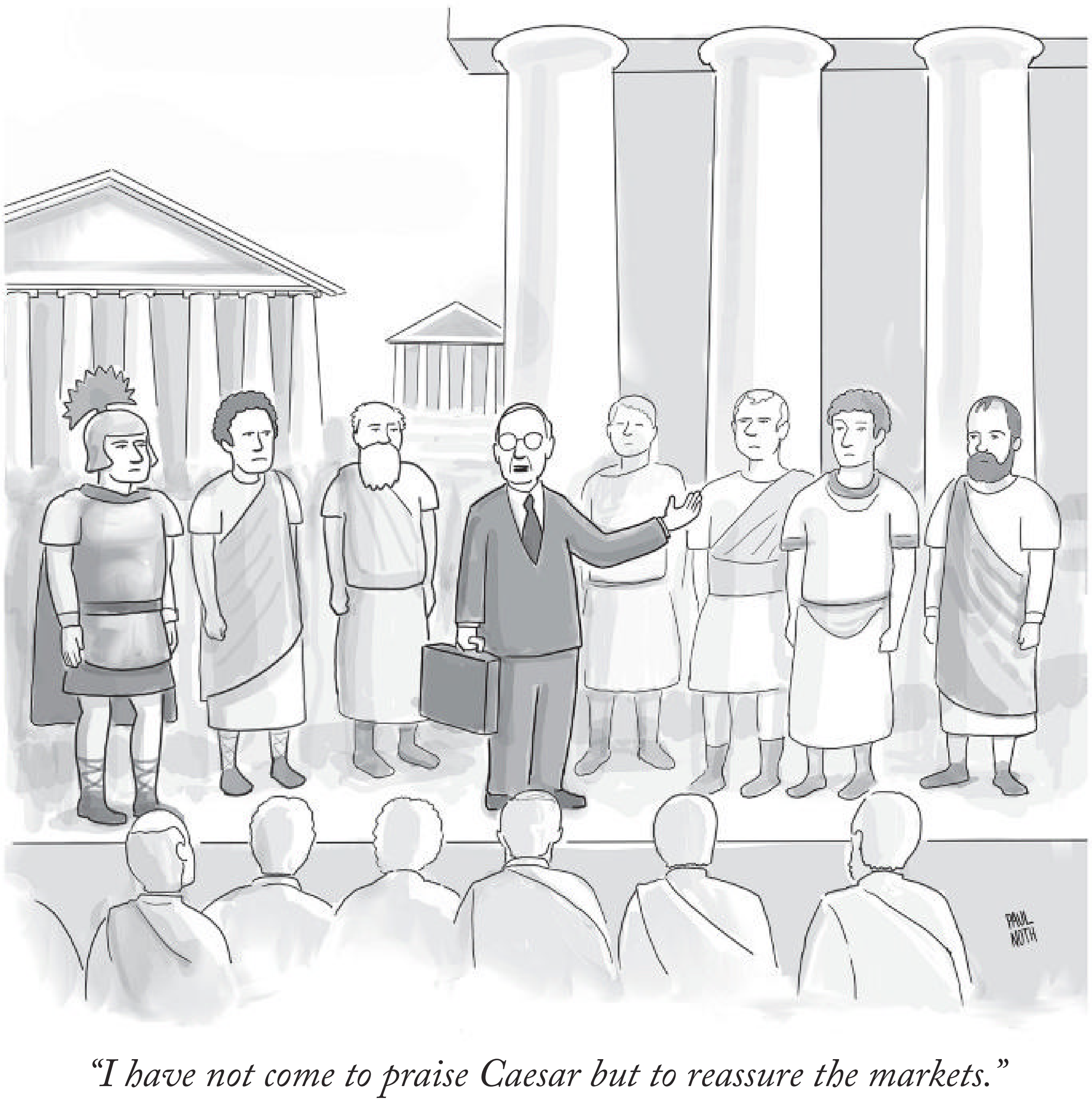
Roads region—a natural roadstead channel of deep water in Chesapeake Bay, fed by the James, Nansemond, and Elizabeth Rivers—seawater is now swelling up at an unprecedented rate. The environmental writer Jeff Goodell visited the station and wrote, "There is no high ground on the base, nowhere to retreat to. It feels like a swamp that has been dredged and paved over—and that's pretty much what it is."

It is in and around wetlands that the greatest blossoming of biodiversity has occurred—it is not too much to say that we owe our existence to this planet's wetlands, including fens, bogs, and swamps. Our wholesale destruction of wetlands for the sake of a few decades of growing wheat, rice, soy, and palm oil has been breathtakingly shortsighted. Once again, we are shocked into recognition that most of us live only for the moment.

The great Southern coastal swamps of the United States were and are treasures of the natural world. Some have been exploited and damaged beyond recognition; some are still rich and wonderful, preserved as wildlife refugia or parks. Visitors can share the amazement and delight of the botanist William Bartram, whose exploratory travels in Georgia and Florida between 1765 and 1776 yielded writings and drawings that show a wild, tropical South—warily sensitive Seminoles, violent and crafty alligators, exquisite unnamed flowers, masses of bayonet-like grasses, colossal black oaks. Every fly-fisher will appreciate his description of the mayfly hatch:

> Innumerable millions of winged beings, voluntarily verging on to destruction, to the brink of the grave, where they behold bands of their enemies with wide open jaws, ready to receive them. But . . . gay and tranquil each meets his beloved mate in the still air, inimitably bedecked in their new nuptial robes. What eye can trace them, in their varied wanton amorous chaces, bounding and fluttering on the odiferous air!

Bartram was the son of the Philadelphia Quaker John Bartram, who had been appointed Botanist for the American Colonies by George III. John Bartram made the country's first botanical garden on his Philadelphia property. Father and son often went on botanical expeditions together. One such was to Georgia's lower Altamaha, where in 1765 they first discovered the Franklinia, in a sandhill bog. This small, beautiful tree is now extinct in the wild but continues to delight American gardeners, who grow specimens all descended from those few seeds collected by William Bartram on his Georgia travels. Thinking of the Bartrams, I once planted the closely related Stewartia in my garden, while I was living in Port Townsend, Washington; it grew handsomely but did not flower during my time there.



"I have not come to praise Caesar but to reassure the markets."

A valuable medicinal plant was the Bartrams' second find. "It grows twelve or fifteen feet high," William Bartram wrote, "with large panicles of pale blue tubular flowers, specked on the inside with crimson." This was *Pinckneya pubens*, the Georgia "fever tree," a natural source of quinine used by Native Americans to treat tick fever, muscle cramps, parasites, and malaria.

At times, the travels were dangerous or pestiferous, as when Bartram fell asleep next to his campfire to enjoy "but a few moments, when I was awakened and greatly surprised, by the terrifying screams of Owls in the deep swamps around me . . . which increased and spread every way for miles around, in dreadful peals vibrating through the dark extensive forests." This past spring, in New Hampshire, I heard amorous owls similarly whooping and caterwauling in the woods. One of Bartram's more admirably descriptive passages pinpoints the belligerence of the "subtle greedy alligator":

> Behold him rushing forth from the flags and reeds. His enormous body swells. His plaited tail brandished high, floats upon the lake. The waters like a cataract descend from his opening jaws. Clouds of smoke issue from his dilated nostrils. The earth trembles with his thunder. When immediately from the opposite coast of the lagoon, emerges from the deep his rival champion. They suddenly dart upon each other. The boiling surface of the lake marks their rapid course, and a terrific conflict commences. They now sink to the bottom folded together in horrid wreaths. The water becomes thick and discolored. Again they rise. . . . Again they sink.

The American biologist and ornithologist Brooke Meanley, who died in 2007, knew intimately every swamp corner that the Bartrams had visited two centuries earlier. He spent most of his

professional life in the Southern swamps. Born in Maryland in 1915, and educated at the University of Maryland, Meanley worked as an ornithologist for the Department of the Interior. In his work, he took thousands of pictures of swamp habitats and birds—including many that no longer exist.

During the Second World War, he served for four years, and was stationed in Georgia, rehabilitating returning soldiers with damaged bodies and psyches. His way was to take the jittery men on hikes and bird walks through nearby forests and swamps. One can only guess how many bird-watchers and amateur naturalists found mental balance and lifelong interests in the natural world through these expeditions. Certainly they learned from him that cutting old-growth forests removed vital bird habitat.

Meanley's years in and around the Southern water lands are encapsulated in his book "Swamps, River Bottoms and Canebrakes." I had never heard of the Slovac Thicket until I read Meanley's description: "For its size, the fourteen-acre Slovac Thicket, located in the heart of the Grand Prairie near Stuttgart, Arkansas, packed the most wildlife excitement per acre that I have ever known." It's a good bet that a sky totally black with twenty million birds, such as he saw and photographed that day, cannot now be seen.

Swamps and birds go together; when the swamp disappears, so do the birds. The New World warblers (a.k.a. wood warblers), a group of about fifty small passerine birds that migrate from South and Central America to the boreal forests of Alaska and Canada, were Meanley's favorites. Many are brightly colored, and their complicated high-pitched songs are difficult to hear. They flicker and flit through branches and reeds like sunlight on a windy day and are a challenge to see. In a perfect world, a warbler can live for a decade, but in the world of predatory house cats, wind turbines, and enormous glass buildings a warbler is lucky to live two years. Meanley found that the bottomlands of the I'On Swamp, in South Carolina, were a choice habitat for the Bachman's warbler, once the seventh most common migratory bird, annually flying up from Cuba to breed in the blackberry swamps and cane thickets of the Southeast United States. The swamp, named for a landowner, Jacob I'On, was the hunting ground for an early American ornithologist, the Reverend John Bachman, who in 1833 first found the songbird. His friend John James Audubon listed the warbler in his "Ornithological Biography." As other wetlands were drained and cut, warblers found a refuge in the I'On. Meanley counted himself fortunate to have twice seen a Bachman's warbler in his lifetime—in 1958 and 1963. In his day, he knew that the species was near extinction. It has not been seen since 1988 and is now presumed to have joined the passenger pigeon and the ivorybill.

For Meanley, the prince of Southern swamps was the Okefenokee, which contained up to twenty-five feet of peat deposits, and was once a haunt of the ivorybill. In describing the swamp's charms, he wrote that it had everything: "The live oak hammocks, alligators and large wading birds, and the legends. In my judgement it is the most picturesque swamp in North America." It was, he observed, a mosaic of lakes, shrub bogs, and cypress heads and bays, and though much of its cypress had been cut in the early twentieth century, fifty years later, when he was back in the Okefenokee, lusty regrowth allowed him to say that the swamp "looks today as it did when it was the stronghold of the Seminoles and Creeks."

When I was in my twenties, my then husband and I sometimes vacationed in the Georgia islands—St. Simons or Sea Island—and we went once to the Okefenokee for a motorboat outing. For hours, we prowled the dark water at low speed, bathed in the damp, heady Southern air that always made me happy when I stepped off the plane into its distinctive perfume. I could not count all the wading birds that stalked in the shallows like tall, aloof models. We glided past cypress and their peculiar pointy knees. Our guide said the knees breathed for the cypress. He pulled up to a small island and waved his hand with a grandiose gesture at the mossy ground. I stepped out of the boat and felt the ground move in an undulating roll. It was a mat of sphagnum moss, and although some people say it is like walking on a waterbed, its billowy heave seemed to me more like

THE NEW YORKER

The New Yorker app, now available on Android.



A new way to read top stories and explore hundreds of issues, at home or on the go.

Exclusively for subscribers.
Download it today.

GET IT ON Google Play

Scan to download.

a wave of dizziness before you pass out—a very slow falling sensation although you remain upright.

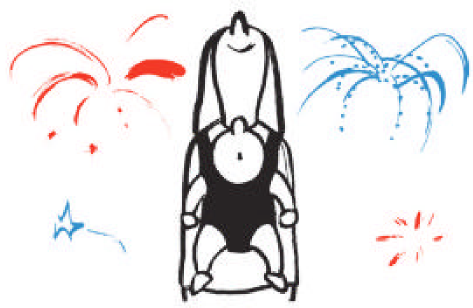
My most intimate swamp experience came one summer when I lived in a remote and ramshackle house in Vermont with a beaver-populated swamp half a mile down in the bottomland. I went to the swamp almost every day by a circuitous route through the woods, passing a patch of pitcher plants and two or three sundews, across a brook, following the beavers' tree-drag ruts to an old stick dam. There were trout in this swamp and beautiful painted turtles. I watched the amazing acrobatics of dragonflies with disbelief that they were actually doing what I saw them do. Even when I sat on the back porch high above the swamp I thought I could catch the green smell of bruised lily pads.

Once, after weeks away, I came back to the house in the late afternoon. I had started reading Norman Maclean's story "A River Runs Through It" on the plane ride home and decided to read to the end before I went inside the house. It was an utterly quiet, windless day, the light softening to peach nectar. I read the last page and its famous final line, "I am haunted by waters." I closed the book and looked toward the swamp. Sitting on a stone wall fifteen feet away was a large bobcat who had been watching me read. When our eyes met, the cat slipped into the tall grass like a ribbon of water, and I watched the grass quiver as it headed down to the woods, to the stream, to the swamp.

After the Lewis and Clark expedition of 1804-06 and the Erie Canal's gradual opening from 1825 onward, the country's swelling population pushed into the new Western territories. The Great Black Swamp, a product of the excess of mire left over from the glacial melting of the Ice Age-era Lake Erie, and which covered much of Ohio and parts of Michigan and Indiana, inspired visceral revulsion. The Black Swamp froze itself blue in winter and simmered under the summer sun. It was forty miles wide and a hundred and twenty miles long, an elm-ash watery woodland well stocked with snakes, wildcats, moose, birds, malaria-carrying mosquitoes, and unnamed demons, immovably in the way of all who were trying to go west. Travellers forced to splash through swamps under attack from blackflies, no-see-ums, and deerflies, or to make long, tiresome detours around watery areas, complained vociferously and called to the heavens for drainage.

By the eighteen-fifties, farmers noticed that raised stream banks in parts of the swamp were made of dry black soil. They picked up handfuls of it, rubbed it between their fingers, felt the friability and tensile strength, judged its tilth. Then they cut down the stream-bank trees, plowed and planted, and harvested tremendous crops. They said what every farmer in newly opened peatland has ever said as they gathered the first harvests: "This is some of the most productive soil on earth." Other farmers noticed, and since stream-bank acres were limited, a few men with experience in wet soils tried drainage with ditches and tiles. Excited by their success, the farmers attacked the Black Swamp; a mad make-your-own-land rush was on. In the eighteen-eighties, an Ohio man, James B. Hill, frustrated by the slow work of laying drainage tiles, invented a machine he called the Buckeye Traction Digger. Every farmer wanted one, and the Black Swamp began to dry out.

Pro-drainage legislation helped the process along, and woe betide the landowner who resisted his neighbor's drain work. In 1915, Ben Palmer of Minnesota wrote a legal guide to drainage. Chapter 4—"Drainage Legislation and Adjudication"—explains, "Thirty-six states of the Union have now enacted general drainage laws for the purpose of providing the legal machinery which is necessary if drainage work involving any considerable amount of land is to be successfully carried on."



By the early twentieth century, only a pinch of the original Black Swamp still existed—the rest was "some of the most productive soil on earth." It was taken as a stroke of luck that drainage tiles could be made from the clay deposits beneath the good peaty soil—in a way, the Black Swamp paid for its own annihilation. But a few generations later the productive soils were depleted; the nutrients in organic soils will disappear when they are not replenished. Manure grew scarce as tractors replaced horses. The farm world welcomed synthetic fertilizer. Time passed, and the Maumee River, which drains the Ohio cropland watershed, became a major source of pollution in Lake Erie. I was once on a train that stopped for hours on a bridge over the Maumee River to let freight traffic through. There was no sign—frothy scum, iridescent gloss, or bright algae—to show that just below the train flowed Lake Erie's poison enemy.

Aside from the joys of draining, there was another pot of gold at the end of the swamp: fortunes for the nineteenth-century woodland owners and professional timbermen who cut down the wetland forests not only of Ohio but of Michigan, Indiana, Illinois, Georgia, Louisiana, Florida, and any other state north or south that had swamp forests—taking irreplaceable giant elm, ash, oak, birch, poplar, maple, basswood, hickory, and chestnut.

Ohio residents, by and large, did not appear to miss their state's swampland. Sharon Levy, a science writer who specializes in water and wetland issues today, wrote of the mark the Black Swamp made on Ohioans:

> The tough people who conquered the Great Black Swamp did so at great personal expense, and they've passed down a deep and abiding loathing of wetlands. They are considered a menace, a threat, a thing to be overcome. These attitudes are enshrined in state law, which makes impossible any action, including wetland restoration, that slows the flow of runoff through those miles of constructed drainage ditches—the very conduits that, after each heavy rainfall, deliver thousands of metric tons of phosphorus and nitrogen to the Maumee, and onward into Lake Erie from which millions of people drink.

One authority on water, William Mitsch, has suggested that if ten per cent of the old Black Swamp soils were allowed to become wetlands again they would cleanse the runoff, yet Ohioans remain powerfully anti-wetland. Even private efforts to restore small wetland

areas are met with neighbors' complaints about noisy frogs and fears of flooding. Still, despite all odds, there exists the Black Swamp Conservancy, a land trust that oversees twenty-one thousand acres of wetlands. Hundreds of active Black Swamp Conservancy members are doing their best to restore and protect remnants of this great swamp. Can they persevere?

My mother's favorite book when she was a teen-ager, in the nineteen-twenties, was one that she loved for its swamp setting, Gene Stratton Porter's "A Girl of the Limberlost." The Limberlost Swamp is in northeast Indiana, forty miles west of the Great Black Swamp. Porter's home was near the Limberlost, which, though small at thirteen thousand acres, was still a diverse and complex system of streams and ponds eventually draining into the Wabash River. The Limberlost was made up of timber, reeds, sphagnum moss, orchids, sundew, pitcher plants, and grasses that nurtured great crowds of waterbirds and migratory birds, snakes, frogs and other amphibians, deer, muskrat and beaver, mink, and an encyclopedia of insects, including rare moths and butterflies.

There are at least two and probably more stories of how the name Limberlost originated. In one, a man named James Miller, so physically agile he was called Limber Jim, was hunting in the swamp. He became hopelessly lost, walking in deadly circles before he began to blaze trees in a straight line. His friends found him and referred to the swamp ever after as the place where Limber was lost. Another story refers to Limber Jim Corbus (what is it with these flexible Indiana men?), who also set out for a day's hunt in the swamp and became lost, but blazed no trees and was never found.

Despite being considered a "nature" novel, "Girl of the Limberlost" is the usual American story of taking from nature for personal gain. The book champions its heroine, Elnora, who collects the chrysalides of moths, then raises, kills, and mounts them. After her miserable first day in high school, where she is scorned as an out-of-fashion backwoods hick, she sees a placard in the local bank window offering cash for moths, cocoons, and pupa cases. Elnora needs money to buy the kind of nice clothes and cosmetics that will let her join modish high-school cliques and pay for her books. She describes her moths to the placard's writer, who tells her, "Young woman, that's the rarest moth in America. If you have a hundred of them they are worth a hundred dollars according to my list." Elnora is on her way to wealth, a career, a rich husband, and all the rest of it, thanks to the corpses of the Yellow Emperor moth.

Against Porter's protests, the Limberlost was ruinously drained for farmland by steam-powered dredges between 1888 and 1910. But in the nineteen-nineties Indiana readers who treasured Porter's book bought some of the original swamp acreage and, with help from several conservation groups, started restoring the swamp by removing drainage tiles. As the water deepened, they planted native sedges, grasses, trees, and water plants. Today, a small piece of the Limberlost exists again, serving as a tourist attraction and a home to muskrats, ducks, herons, turtles, fish, and insects. The Yellow Emperor moths are still around.

It is an important decision to restore even a small piece of wetland that has been severely mauled—once land is apportioned to owners, there can be no easy path to restoration of a natural habitat. Bogs and swamps take thousands of years to build up and develop; humans and their machinery can wipe out those centuries in a few months. But once a few interested people put on their boots and go into the damaged wetland, and once their curiosity is aroused about how the water moves, and what plants, amphibians, and birds formerly thrived in their local remnant swamp, they are hard to stop. There is unequalled joy in restoration.

Mangroves are marine trees. They grow in brackish and saline water along Southern and tropical shores—their splayed-out roots resemble the "cages" that supported Victorian hoop skirts—and they form peat. Their specialized home ground, such as Florida's Everglades, is smelly and muddy. There are roughly sixty species of mangrove, mostly found in Asia, and the strongest forests are those of mixed species. Mangrove swamps have been called the earth's most important ecosystem, because they form a bristling wall that stabilizes the land's edge and protects



"I've got all the first-name key chains they don't put on the rack."

shorelines from hurricanes and erosion, and because they are breeding grounds and protective nurseries for thousands of species, including barracuda, tarpon, snook, crabs, shrimp, and shellfish. They take the full brunt of most storms and hurricanes, and generally survive—but not always. Hurricane Irma, in 2017, hit the mangroves of Big Pine Key, in Florida. While shrubs came back after a time, the mangroves did not. Some saw the cause of mangrove death as trapped standing salt water, but others thought that the storm surge had plastered a very fine coating of sediment on the vital aerial roots, which dried into a choking hard sealant.

Mangrove leaves fall into the water and, as they decay, become the base for a complex food web benefitting algae, invertebrates, and the creatures who feed on them, such as jellyfish, anemones, various worms and sponges, and birds. The peat that mangroves form is especially soft and deep, ideal for clams and snails, crabs and shrimp. The mangrove's roots filter out harmful nitrate and phosphate pollutants. The tangled branches above the water make a safe habitat for literally thousands of species of insects that attract birds. They offer resting places for migrating birds and nesting places for others, including kingfishers, herons, and egrets. Monitor lizards, macaque monkeys, and fishing cats on the hunt prowl the branches. Below the water, the knots of interlaced roots protect tiny fish from the ravenous jaws of larger fish, and even manatees and dolphins take refuge in these swamps. Mangroves interact with coral by trapping muddy sediment that would smother the reef, while the offshore reef protects the mangroves and seagrass beds from pummelling waves. Structurally, mangroves form an enormous hedge that extends down into the water and high above it. They are a major part of the "blue carbon" group that absorbs CO_2, which also includes the salt marshes, seagrasses, and beds of kelp and other seaweeds.

With all these virtues, it would seem that mangroves must be the most valued trees on earth. Unfortunately, that is not the case. Although climate researchers see mangrove swamps as crucially important frontline defenses against rising seawater and as superior absorbers of CO_2—they are five times more efficient than tropical forests—they are in big trouble, and mangrove removal is a constant threat.

In 2010, a count showed that about fifty-three thousand square miles of mangrove forest protected the earth's coasts. But six years later thirteen hundred square miles of mangroves had been lost to palm-oil and rice farms and shrimp aquaculture. In some cases, mangrove forests have been removed to make room for shrimp ponds; in other cases, the shrimp ponds are set back from the mangroves, but the released effluents and pollution still damage and degrade the mangrove forest by changing the water's salinity, altering the mangrove's ability to take in nutrients. The consequence is slow death for the mangroves.

Many countries have tried to master the complexities of mangrove restoration, with mixed results. Choice of the right site and a mutually beneficial mix of species is critical. Some well-intentioned restorers planted greenhouse-raised single-species saplings in mudflats that mangroves had never grown in, or that were exposed to erosion and strong waves. Yet mudflats have a low oxygen supply because they are constantly wet, and mangroves need to breathe.

A different approach was that of the Florida biologist, ichthyologist, and wetlands ecologist Roy (Robin) Lewis III, who worked out the details of effective mangrove restoration. Repetitive observation can unravel the mysteries of events and processes. Lewis, who was born in 1944, was still a graduate student when he began working in mangrove swamps. "I spent a decade working in the mangroves before I started to have an understanding of what was going on," he once remarked. He dedicated years to puzzling out the rhythms of mangrove happiness. He observed that, in the natural order, when a mangrove tree died, plentiful seeds from nearby healthy mangroves floated in and rooted themselves. The problem with many restoration attempts was location. Just any random part of a shoreline would not work. The flow of water had to be correct. Mangrove roots need to be sometimes wet and sometimes dry. Lewis worked out a wet-dry ratio of thirty to seventy. "They have a short period of wetness, and then they have a long extended period of dryness, and those alternate daily," he told a reporter for the Smithsonian Institute. "That's the secret: you've got to replicate that hydrology."

His first trial of this theory came in 1986, with thirteen hundred acres of damaged and dead mangroves half smothered in dirt and weeds on a flat site near Fort Lauderdale. After several years of experiment and study, Lewis brought in earth-moving equipment to create a gentle slope of land that would allow the natural tidewaters to ebb and flow. Then he waited. The tides brought mangrove seeds that took root, and five years later three local species of mangroves were growing. Fish moved into the sheltering roots, and the birds followed. No mangrove saplings were hand-planted; all the new trees grew from waterborne mangrove seeds. Lewis's way of working with nature—observation and study, planning and patient waiting—has become the gold standard for restoration.

It is usual to think of the vast wetland losses as a tragedy, with hopeless conviction that the past cannot be retrieved. Tragic, indeed, and part of our climate-change anguish. But as we learn how valuable wetlands are in softening the shocks of the changing climate, and how eagerly the natural world responds to concerned care, perhaps we can shift the weight of wetland destruction from inevitable to "not on my watch." Can we become Thoreauvian enough to see wetlands as desirable landscapes that protect the earth while refreshing our joy in existence? For conservationists the world over, finding this joy is central to having a life well lived.

It is of course possible to love a swamp. I remember another small and nameless Vermont larch swamp, which could be reached only by passage through a dark and gloomy ravine that I thought of as the Slough of Despond.

At the bottom of the ravine ran Jacobs Chopping Brook. The flurried, emotional water of the brook contrasted with the black glass disk of swamp water that seemed made to reflect passing clouds but under rain showed itself as dimpled pewter. It has been fifty years since I last saw it, but it is still with me. ♦

SHOUTS & MURMURS



LUCI GUTIÉRREZ

MISSED CONNECTIONS, 1/7/21

BY MIKE O'BRIEN

Craigslist, Washington, D.C.

Funky orange cap

I saw you walking from the speech to the Capitol. You were wearing a tactical vest and funky little orange cap. You were screaming something about being a patriot. Our eyes met, and we spoke briefly and realized we were both interested in travel and in scary movies. You were really out of breath. I helped you get a Marlboro wrapper out of your beard. You mentioned multiple times that you like feet and wanted me to know that you rank feet above even travel and scary movies. Wish I'd asked for your number to chat more.

Cuter Bo Burnham

You looked like Bo Burnham but cuter and with more of a beard. You were wearing a Colonial-guy uniform and climbing onto a statue of Gerald Ford when our eyes met. I asked if I could climb onto the statue with you and you said no. That made me smile. We talked/shouted a little. You mentioned that you owned two chameleons and that you were in the market for a third. I said I'd keep an ear out. Would love 2 get coffee ☺

Art lover

You were trying to pry a painting off the wall using a shard of glass. You had a beard. I'd been separated from my husband in the crowd and ended up shouting with you a little bit. You yelled "Best of all time" in my face. I think I said, "O.K., sounds good," but it may have been lost in the noise. I had on khaki pants. Want to talk more or have coffee?

Mystery man with tucked-in shirt

You were wearing a blue shirt that was intensely tucked into your jeans. Our eyes locked while you were setting up a gallows. Don't know if u remember me. I'm shy AF and was wearing a gas mask with a steamed-up visor, so maybe you didn't even notice the eye contact, LOL. If you felt what I felt, hit my mailbox ASAP. I'm dying literally I'm sick LOL real.

Military man looking for bathroom

You were an older guy, sixties. I'm in my fifties. You were cute and wearing a vaguely military uniform and holding a huge flag, but I could tell you were not really in the military and never had been. Granted, I'm just a Bulgarian cleaning woman, but I can tell when someone is really in the military or knows what it's like to have been in the military. Any military. Like, even the worst one ever wouldn't have its uniform look like that. Anyway, we made eye contact and you screamed in my face that you needed to find a bathroom or I'd be working overtime mopping the Capitol floor, and I pointed you toward the men's room. But then you hesitated like you were going to say something else—I want to know what you were going to say. I think I thought it, too.

Cute aide

You were crawling over me on the floor of the gallery when our eyes met. You were wearing a cute blue suit and an employee badge. We bonded about both wanting to get out of there. You also mentioned liking the band Arcade Fire. I didn't say anything, which you took to mean that I didn't like Arcade Fire, but really I'd been distracted by the sound of glass shattering. You then spoke at length about how you don't like Arcade Fire *that* much. Actually, I like Arcade Fire fine. Would like to get coffee. I'm a senator.

Smile or strain

You were the only girl I saw all day. I was told that this would be a place to meet ladies, but that was certainly not the case, ha. You were wearing two camouflage jackets. One on top of the other, ha. We made eye contact while you were taking a dump in the rotunda. Couldn't tell if you were smiling or straining, but I hope smiling! 'Cause I thought you were cute. Let me know which it was. Would like to go for coffee if was smiling. ♦

ONWARD AND UPWARD WITH THE ARTS

NOISE MAKERS

The analog delights of Foley sound effects.

BY ANNA WIENER

The salvage yard at M. Maselli & Sons, in Petaluma, California, is made up of six acres of angle irons, block pulleys, doorplates, digging tools, motors, fencing, tubing, reels, spools, and rusted machinery. To the untrained eye, the place is a testament to the enduring power of American detritus, but to Foley artists—craftspeople who create custom sound effects for film, television, and video games—it's a trove of potential props. On a recent morning, Shelley Roden and John Roesch, Foley artists who work at Skywalker Sound, the postproduction audio division of Lucasfilm, stood in the parking lot, considering the sonic properties of an enormous industrial hopper. "I'm looking for a resonator, and I need more ka-chunkers," Roden, who is blond and in her late forties, said. A lazy Susan was also on the checklist—something to produce a smooth, swivelling sound. Roesch, a puffer-clad sexagenarian with white hair, had brought his truck, in the event of a large haul. The pair was joined by Scott Curtis, their Foley mixer, a bearded fiftysomething. Curtis was in the market for a squeaky hinge. "There was a door at the Paramount stage that had the best creak," he said. "The funny thing was, the cleaning crew discovered this hinge squeak, and they lubricated the squeak—the hinge. It was never the same."

Petaluma is a historically agricultural town, and that afternoon was the thirty-ninth annual Butter and Egg Days Parade; the air smelled of lavender and barbecued meat. Inside the yard, Curtis immediately gravitated toward a pile of what looked like millstones, or sanding wheels. He began rotating one against another, producing a gritty, high-pitched ring, like an elementary-school fire alarm. "The texture is great," Roden said. She suggested that one of the wheels could be used as a sweetener—a sound that is subtly layered over another sound, to add dimension—for a high-tech roll-up door, or perhaps one made of stone. "It's kinda chimey," she said, wavering. "It has potential." A few yards away, Curtis had moved on to a shelf of metal filing-cabinet drawers, freckled with rust. "We have so many metal boxes," Roden said, and walked away.

"It's kinda the squeak I was looking for," Curtis said softly.

"Hey, guys, remember the 'Black Panther' area?" Roden called out. "Wanna explore?" She led the group past a rack of hanging chains, also rusted; Curtis lightly palmed a few in sequence, producing the pleasant rings of a tintinnabulum. Roden pointed to the spot where she had found a curved crowbar to create the sound of Vibranium—a fictional rare metal unique to the Marvel universe—before zeroing in on a rack of thimbles, clamps, nuts, bolts, and washers. The trio began knocking and tapping hardware together, producing a series of chimes, tinks, and clunks. Roesch, who calls himself an "audile"—someone who processes information in a primarily auditory manner, rather than in a visual or a material one—had unearthed a sceptre-like industrial tool with a moving part, and was rapidly sliding it back and forth. "Robot," he said.

The bulk of the sound in film is typically added in postproduction. "I always say there's sound effects, like footsteps,



"I feel like a shoe cobbler," a Foley artist said. "We're still making things with our hands, or with our feet."

ILLUSTRATION BY YOLANDE MUTALE

and then there's music," the director David Lynch, whose films are famous for their inventive, evocative sound design, said. "And then there's sound effects that are like music. . . . They conjure a feeling." Traditionally, "hard effects" cover ambient noises such as traffic or rain, or the more mechanical, combustive sounds of explosions and gunfire; they are usually pulled from libraries, or electronically produced. Foley effects are custom to a film, and are synchronized to characters' movements. They might include the sound of someone walking across a room, rolling over in bed, stirring a pot, typing, fighting, dancing, eating, falling, or kissing. The line between the two kinds of effect is thin: Foley artists record the sound of a hand twisting a doorknob, but not the sound of the mechanism turning within. Foley is subtle but suggestive, capturing offstage bedsprings, or the shuffle of a clumsy intruder. In the past hundred years, technology has changed the process of recording, editing, and engineering sounds, but the techniques of Foley have remained stubbornly analog. Behind any given Foley effect, no matter how complex, are one or two people contorting their bodies in a soundproof room.

Foley artists have historically worked in pairs. (Certain sounds are so complex that they require the labor of four hands.) Roden and Roesch are two of the masters in their field. David Fincher, the director of movies including "The Social Network," "Gone Girl," and "Mank," told me that Foley is "a very strange calling," and "a dark art" foundational to filmmaking. "You're trying to make beautiful sounds that make their point once and get the hell out of Dodge," Fincher said. "The people who do it really, really well are few and far between."

The group continued walking through the salvage yard, clanking poles together, pushing buttons, tapping metal surfaces, flapping doors, turning cranks. Roesch pulled a handle on the front of an electrical cabinet, and it made a satisfying *fnnp*. "Those are sha-shonkers, for sure," Roden said approvingly. She flipped a large metal clasp back and forth. "It's lovely." The group headed to a rack of hinges. Roden tested one; it made a seesawing squeal. She retrieved another and flapped it back and forth. "Screaming puppy," she said, shaking her head. She looked up at me. "Did you lose a filling?"

For an audile, the yard seemed like a potentially overstimulating environment. I imagined the old mattress springs and racks of hardware bursting to life, "Fantasia"-like, jangling and clunking in a private cacophony. I relayed this to Roden, who shook her head. "No, no, no, not at all—it's potential creativity," she said. "You know what's overstimulating? Sitting in a movie theatre."

Sound effects emerged in the late nineteenth century, as the motion-picture industry experimented with accompaniment to silent films. Theatres brought in live bands, orchestras, lecturers, and hidden actors who stomped and clattered in conjunction with movies; they tested strategically placed phonographs and the Kinetophone, a contraption introduced by Thomas Edison, which attempted to synch sound to movement. Enterprising inventors created effects "traps," small machines meant to imitate everyday sounds such as a baby crying or a nose being blown. In a recent paper for the academic journal *Film History*, Stephen Bottomore, a historian of early cinema, cited a 1911 article that griped about the maximalism such devices facilitated: "It is often the case that a youth with no imagination, and with very limited brain power, combined with a spirit of mischief, 'lets himself go,' when presiding over the sound machine."

In 1926, Warner Bros., then a small outfit best known for a movie about a German shepherd named Rin Tin Tin, débuted the Vitaphone, which allowed for synchronized recorded sound. That year, the studio released "Don Juan," a silent film with a recorded musical score and a handful of sound effects: tepid clicks to accompany swords in combat; clangs and chimes to add weight to wedding bells. Initially, it was impractical for production teams to edit recordings, and dialogue, music, and sound effects had to be recorded in real time, on set. "In a lot of cases, those recordings were still the sounds that musicians used to perform in the theatres," Emily Thompson, a historian of technology at Princeton, told me. "You'll hear drummers instead of machine guns, or saxophones when ducks go by onscreen."

Foley takes its name from Jack Foley, a stuntman, prop handler, and assistant director at Universal Pictures in the late twenties. His breakout was "Show Boat," which was initially intended to be a silent film; facing competition from Warner Bros., Universal added a soundtrack, which included dialogue, during post-production. Jack Foley provided sound effects: handclaps, footsteps. He built a small crew, and their workspace became known as "Foley's room"; other studios eventually developed their own "Foley stages." Later, a technique known as sound-on-film—in which recorded sound is converted to light waves printed directly onto film strips—made it possible to work with effects separately, something that allowed for more artistic freedom. In the thirties, sound technicians sought "wild" recordings—a literalism that prioritized the grinding rush of an actual train over the smoother, more controllable sound of roller skates cruising over a wood floor. But some directors used sound effects for their suggestive qualities, such as the growing thunder of encroaching shells in "A Farewell to Arms," or the sinister whistling of the serial killer Hans Beckert in Fritz Lang's "M."

In the decades that followed, sound work continued to evolve, both technologically and aesthetically. Studios assembled robust catalogues of sound effects. (Certain stock sound effects became famous, such as the "Wilhelm scream," which was reproduced in dozens of movies.) Multitrack recording enabled effects artists to create more complex soundscapes. But it wasn't until the mid-seventies, with the innovation of Dolby Stereo—a sound system with four channels, rather than the usual two—that filmmakers began to truly embrace the possibilities of stereo sound.

Roesch studied film at N.Y.U. and at the American Film Institute, and entered the industry in 1978. Soon after he moved to Los Angeles, Joan Rowe, who collected rent for Roesch's landlord, and who was freelancing as a Foley artist, brought Roesch into the studio where she worked. "He was absolutely amazing," she told me. "There was a character that came running across the stage, and jumped up, and spun around, and flipped over—I just can't tell you the number of intricate steps that this character had—and John just went *loobaloobaloobaloo*." She made a kind of cartoonish spiral sound to imitate his movements.

Roesch and Rowe became Foley



"The navigation says that we're wasting our time and should never have left home."

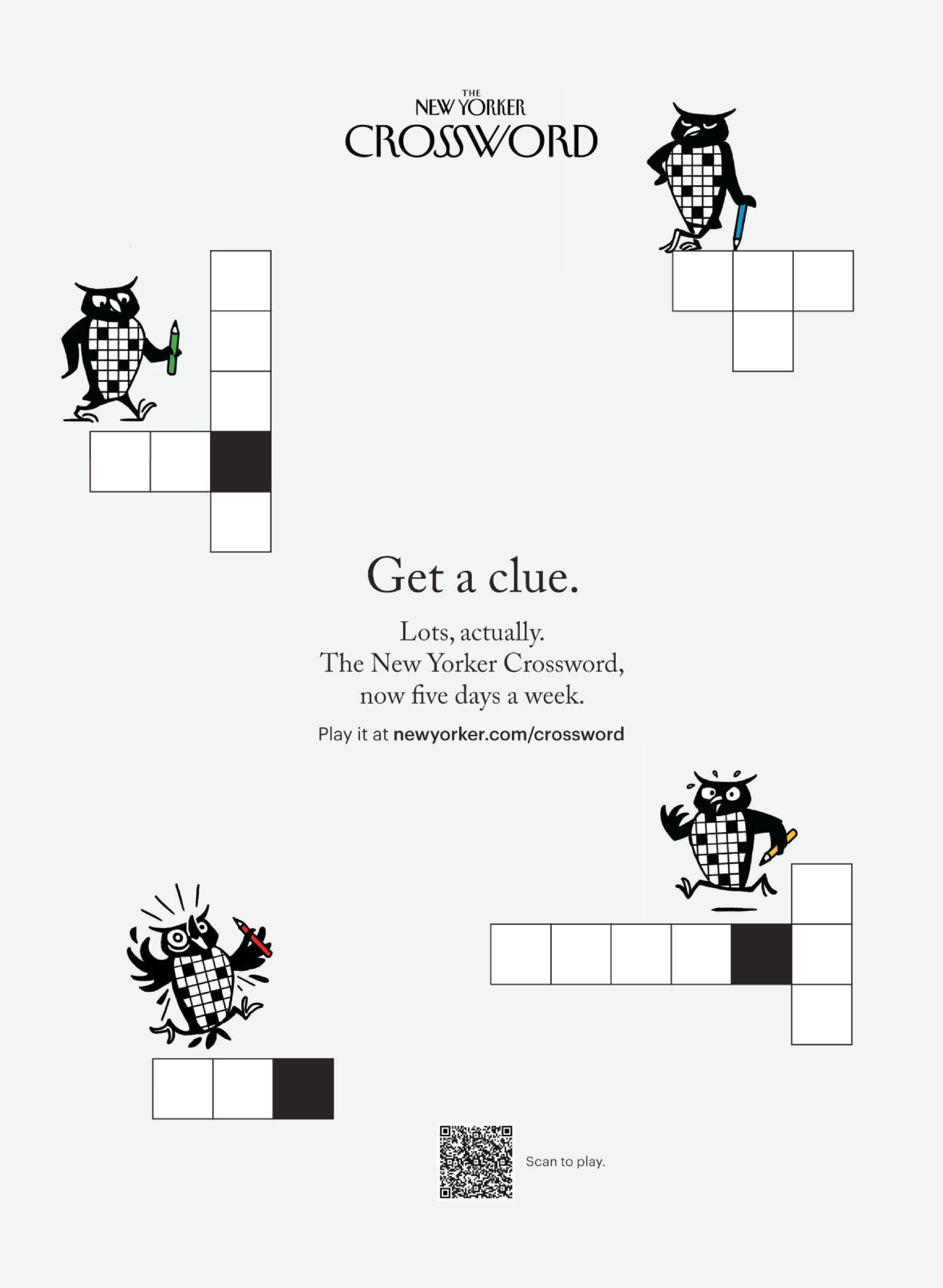
partners. One of their first projects together was "The Black Stallion," from 1979. (To simulate the clatter of horses' hooves, they stuffed toilet plungers with fabric, among other techniques.) Roesch worked on the footsteps for Michael Jackson's dance moves in "Thriller." He and Rowe were hired by Steven Spielberg to do the Foley for "E.T." That film, Rowe told me, was "the Foley artist's dream, the Foley artist's joy." Spielberg had a distinct idea of how he wanted E.T. to sound: liquidy and alien, but funny, and not scary. Most crucially, it was important that the wide-eyed, wrinkled, freaky extraterrestrial be lovable. To make the sounds of E.T.'s movements, Rowe and Roesch landed on raw liver, which slid about in its package, and jello wrapped in a damp T-shirt. For the character's body falls, Rowe recalls using a novelty-sized bag of popcorn; Roesch remembers using a pillowcase filled with rice and cereal.

There are certain well-worn tricks of the trade. Vegetables are old standbys: snapped celery for broken bones, hammered cabbage for a punch. (According to the Web site Atlas Obscura, during the climax of "Titanic," in which Kate Winslet floats, shivering, on a piece of debris, Foley artists peeled back layers of frozen lettuce to add texture to the sound of her crisping hair.) Paper clips or nails, taped to the tips of a glove, are useful for the clicking footsteps of a house pet. Wet pieces of chamois leather, the sort that is used for cleaning cars, are highly versatile. "They sound just like mud," Rowe said. "Also, they're excellent for blood. If you want to stab somebody in the chest, and you want to hear the sound of the knife going in"—here she made a gushing, *kuschhy* sound—"get that chamois out and just squish it. I found this big plastic cup, and when you put a chamois in it, when it's wet, when you rub it up and down"—she emitted another guttural gush—"it makes this incredible sound."

Roesch refers to the eighties as his Camelot. He was part of the Foley team on "The Empire Strikes Back"—a large trash can for R2-D2—and worked on hits such as "Tron," "Lethal Weapon," "Gremlins," and "Sixteen Candles." The director John Hughes's films, Roesch recalled, were straightforward, with the exception of the leather jackets in "The Breakfast Club": "The one thing is, when you have leather jackets, are they just leather jackets, or are they evil, are they over the top—are we going to be concerned about this character?" For Trinity's latex bodysuit in "The Matrix," Roesch and his partner at the time, Hilda Hodges, used "crunchy, scrunchy leather." "Schindler's List" was "the ultimate realism project"—one struggle was finding a sonically accurate typewriter.

Roden, who grew up in western New York and studied at Ithaca College, entered the industry in the nineties. For a time, she did Foley for a small, low-budget studio that specialized in horror and adventure films. ("Volcano, tornado, earthquake," she said.) On the side, she studied the work of Foley veterans such as Marko Costanzo. " 'Barton Fink,' there was a wallpaper peel that was just beautiful," she told me. She learned that Costanzo used two hinges to make door sounds more complex. "From that point forward, I used two props for everything."

The Foley world is small. Roesch likes to say that there are more astronauts on earth than there are working Foley artists. (He estimates that there are currently about a hundred active practitioners in the U.S.) In 2008, Roesch, who had met Roden several years prior, asked whether she wanted to head up the night crew at his Foley stage. In 2016, she joined Skywalker Sound as Roesch's partner. The two make an unlikely pair. Roesch is jocular and outgoing—he hosts a podcast about postproduction with his daughter, called "The Right Scuff," and conducted several hundred Zoom interviews during the pandemic for a Facebook group of sound professionals. Roden


THE
NEW YORKER
CROSSWORD
Get a clue.
Lots, actually.
The New Yorker Crossword,
now five days a week.
Play it at newyorker.com/crossword
Scan to play.

has a humble, almost studious air; in her spare time, she has been drawing sketches for an animated short film, based on Frank Hurley's photographs of the Shackleton expedition, which she plans to score with a rich, Foley-inflected soundscape. Roden and Roesch have a warm patter. They share a fresh-faced enthusiasm, as if they cannot quite believe what they get to do for a living.



Skywalker Sound sits on Skywalker Ranch, a sprawling, peaceful paradise in Nicasio, California, about an hour north of San Francisco. It is enclosed by hills, which are dotted with cattle; mention the cattle, and someone will inevitably note the ranch's Wagyu operation. (The beef is served in Skywalker-owned restaurants in San Francisco, and in a lodge-like campus cafeteria.) The grounds are landscaped so that the buildings, arranged around a swimmable lake, are concealed from one another by a variety of native trees. Walking the ranch's wooded paths, I felt as if I were at an upscale rehab facility, or the sort of Northern Californian retreat that caters to business executives and people whose marriages are failing. It was a bucolic, pastoral setting for the production of mass indoor entertainment.

The Foley stage where Roesch and Roden work is housed in a large, retrofitted barn, painted baby blue, that had had a previous life as George Lucas's personal garage. It looked, to me, like the aftermath of a crisis. In the center was a large dirt area, flanked by two water pits; one had a mattress-size slab of foam draped over it to absorb extra sounds. The room had a variety of flooring zones—steel, wood, concrete—and along the perimeter were all manner of buckets, ladders, electronics, mops, shovels, trunks, suitcases, full-sized wooden doors, carpets, ropes, planks, poles, blankets, and car tires. There was a working shower and toilet, used exclusively for sound effects.

Roden and Roesch guided me through their prop collections. Footsteps are considered one of the hardest aspects of Foley, and the two each had their own shoe rack, with dozens of loafers, heels, pumps, boots, and sandals. "The ultimate goal, for me, anyway, is to make sure the feet are as real as possible," Roesch said. Roden fished around in her desk, and pulled out a latex Halloween mask of the Tin Man, which had torn at the mouth. She crumpled the mask, and it made a yawning, *chhhhh* sound. "I've had this forever," she said. "So reliable." She had recently ordered another mask, from Amazon, but found it too high-pitched and thin; subtle changes in modern materials and manufacturing affect her work. "Things that are passed down from earlier generations are really, really treasures to me," she said. When her former Foley partner Rick Partlow retired, he gave her a copper towel bar from his mother's apartment, with a koi fish on each end which, when twisted, made a screech like a startled cat. "This squeak is one of a kind," she said. "I'm never gonna find anything like this."

In the back of the barn was a collection of props categorized by sound. There were boxes of bones and shells, ribbons, roller skates, coconuts, party supplies, gloves, military helmets, tennis racquets, horse tack, grenades (inert), doorknobs, fishing reels, chain mail, pearls, diapers, pet collars, walkie-talkies, beanbags, Velcro straps, and Christmas bells. There were boxes with handwritten labels: "POPPERS + FARTERS," "SQUEAKERS + MOO-ERS," "SNAPPERS, CLACKERS," and "MAGICAL BELLS." There were "SHOVEL SHINGERS" and "TUBULAR (PLASTIC) THONKS." There was a box labelled "HOOVES," which did not contain any actual hooves, and a box labelled "UNDENIABLY MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS," which contained musical instruments. Off to one side was a car door that had been used for the DeLorean in "Back to the Future"; elsewhere was the "boing box" that gave life to the cartoon rabbit in "Who Framed Roger Rabbit," and the inertia-starter motor, from a nineteen-twenties biplane, that provided sounds for the Tasmanian Devil from Looney Tunes. Roesch looked around the room fondly. "They all have a personality," he said. "David Fein's shing is in here," Roden said, pulling out a shapely, worn piece of metal, and handling it like a historic artifact—which it was, in a sense. The prop had been passed down from David Lee Fein, a Foley artist known for his work on movies such as "RoboCop," "Speed," "American History X," and "The Godfather: Part III."

George Lucas has said that fifty per cent of the cinematic experience is sound, and people who work in sound like to quote him. Certain directors share this view. Fincher, who has worked with Roesch—and, later, Roden and Curtis—on nearly all of his films, has developed a reputation as a sound obsessive. " 'Fight Club' has a lot of intra-body punishment," Fincher told me. "Some of the greatest punches in the history of cinema have to be Ben Burtt's stuff for 'Raiders of the Lost Ark.' They were spectacular. But when we used that kind of stuff in 'Fight Club' they just felt like movie punches. It felt like a glorification. When you hear somebody really get hit—and I'm not talking about professional prizefighters but regular idiots outside a bar—a lot of times it's pretty underwhelming. But there is something about when it's right, and it's awful, and it makes you kind of squint—that's what we were looking for. The 'Raiders' stuff is exquisite to the ear. It's beautifully done. But it's also hyperbolic in a kind of escapist way." In "Fight Club," he said, "we wanted to make sure that when they were beating on each other it was like punching a sack of potatoes—that it didn't hyperbolize it in a way that made it sexy."

Fincher estimated that ninety-nine per cent of the sound effects in his own films are added in postproduction: "We're looking to make sure that the sound of the cloth, or the sound of the leather, or the squeak of the upholstery is right. You know, is it Naugahyde? Are we saying that this is the conference room of a very, very moneyed law firm in San Francisco, or are we saying it's a mall lawyer? And would you want the chair of a mall lawyer to have more of a pleather, slow sound?"

An essential part of Foley is creating a consistent, coherent reality—which, in the hyperreal world of cinema, is fundamentally skewed. Foley artists often speak of "selling" a sound: making it legible and credible, even when it is dramatized. Deception is an essential part of the enterprise. Things are not as they sound. "You say, 'This sound is so unbelievably creepy,'" Lynch told me. "And they say, 'It's my kid's sweater.'" It is incredibly hard to reverse engineer a well-crafted sound effect, particularly if it is first experienced in the context of a visual. There

is no way to know, for example, that, for the sound of hatching dinosaur eggs in "Jurassic Park," the Foley artist Dennie Thorpe layered the cracking sounds of crushed ice-cream cones with the juicy effect of a hand in a melon. Fincher told me that experimentation was crucial. "Sometimes you hear a sound and you say, 'That's amazing, what is that?'" he said. "It's, like, 'Well, that's yogurt, shot through a hollowed-out tennis-ball can.' And you go, 'All right, don't tell me, I don't want to know.'"

Roden estimated that only twenty per cent of sounds onscreen are generated by the actual objects represented. This presents certain challenges: when a sound cannot be described by its referent, language starts to falter. Over time, Roesch, Roden, and Curtis have developed a lexicon to describe what they want. Sounds are poofy, slimy, or naturale; they might need to be slappier, or raspier, or nebby (nebulous). They are hingey, ticky, boxy, zippy, or clacky; they are tonal, tasty, punchy, splattery, smacky, spanky. They might be described phonetically—a "kachunk-kachunk-kachunk," or a "scritcher"—or straightforwardly ("fake"). Tools, too, have their own names. Shings make shiny metallic sounds—a sword being drawn from its scabbard—and wronkers give the impression of metal sliding across a hard surface. "Like, *chhhrtz*," Roesch clarified.

On a recent spring afternoon, Roesch, Roden, and Curtis were gathered in a sound booth, watching a clip from an upcoming Pixar film, "Lightyear"—a prequel of sorts to "Toy Story." Animated films present their own challenges, not least because they emerge completely silent, aside from dialogue. "There is no organic soul," Roesch said. "You need to help bring that soul to it, that feeling of aliveness." The previous week, the trio had been working on sounds for a writhing mass of enormous tentacled sentient vines that, in one high-octane scene, entangle and attack Buzz Lightyear. The group had agreed that the vines needed to sound splattery and girthy—"the guts will sell it, like kind of gushy, high-end watery," Roden said—but still thicker than water. The artists had landed on a combination of foam padding, suction cups from the bottom of a bathtub mat, a silky cloth, the Tin Man mask, a chamois, and a mophead. The result sounded genuinely menacing, and a little disgusting.

Because fantastical films tend to feature creatures, landscapes, and materials that do not exist in the real world, they come with few sonic references. Directors suggest a mood or a feeling, and Foley artists are left to figure it out. (There is an element of chance to this: the Foley artist Ronni Brown told me that, for the 2017 remake of "The Mummy," she was asked to give the mummy a "dry, stretchy, painful" sound—one she pinned down only after spotting, and fondling, a bowl of potpourri in a rest room. "I touch everything," she said.) For the Pixar film "Soul," Roesch, Roden, and Curtis were tasked with creating the sound of an ethereal bridge stretching to the afterlife. "You couldn't tell what they were walking on, these little souls," Roden said. "It was described to us as kind of glassy, kind of magical." They wound up using a large, thick broken window that Roden had picked up off the side of the road—"We take the scraps, we're seagulls," she said. This was balanced atop a conga drum, and gently tapped with a mallet.

At the beginning of a project, the team receives a cue sheet, detailing every moment in a production that needs a sound. For the most part, the Foley team interprets the mood of the performances. "We're in this house. How gritty is the floor? Or how clean is it?" Curtis said. "She's in high heels. O.K., how pretty are these high heels? What's her character like in relation to those high heels?"

"It's not necessarily you see a shoe, you do that shoe," Roden said.

"It's whatever you believe in," Roesch said.

The cue sheet for "Lightyear" had more than a thousand entries. Not every cue would make it into the final mix, a reality the team addressed with admirable ego detachment. When a sound gets cut or drowned out, Roden told me, she tries to take the attitude "I had fun making it. I loved it. It was loved at one point."

That morning, Roesch was focussed on "bed stuff"—cloth work. He was wearing loose gray sweatpants and a black cotton zip-up; Roden wore yoga pants. The microphones on Foley stages are incredibly sensitive, and Foley artists wear soft clothing to reduce interference. (For "The Ten Commandments," from 1956, Foley artists, recording the sound of bricklaying in a tank of mud and water, were reportedly instructed to work in the nude.) For each cue, Curtis plays the clip on a large screen,



and Roden or Roesch assembles accessories. Once the materials are ready, the recording light goes on, and the room goes dark. The clip plays, and the Foley artists perform in synch with the picture. The clips are often looped, with a brief pause between takes, allowing the artists multiple attempts at each sound. Curtis's view of the Foley stage is blocked by a vast computer monitor, an intentional obstruction: seeing how a sound is created would spoil his ability to evaluate its accuracy and effectiveness. (The Foley artists I spoke to all emphasized the importance of the Foley mixer, whose judgments and interventions are critical.)

Onscreen, Buzz Lightyear and his animatronic cat, Sox, sat down on the bed. There had been some previous discussion about how to animate Sox; Roesch had experimented with a matted battery-operated plush cat, fished out of his desk, before deeming the sounds "too furry," and replacing the stuffed animal with a marker rubbed against foam. That morning, Sox sounded cute, but not cuddly; catlike, but not quite mammalian. In bed, Lightyear was restive: he lay back, turned on his side, turned on his back, pulled his sleep mask down, then placed his hand on the sheet. Roesch rustled his assembled objects, and recorded the sequence. There was a pause, and then Curtis, from the booth, voiced an objection. "It's a hangnail kind of thing," he said, a description Roesch seemed to immediately understand.

There was some discussion about sweetening the sound with a higher *zjuzz;* ultimately, they added a light *shhsl* to the sheet sounds, for dramatic effect. The reel switched to a scene of a robot drawing a line on a whiteboard. Roesch mimicked the robot's gestures with an actual marker and whiteboard. The marker, unfortunately, did not sound enough like a marker. "Want me to give you a little bit of squeak?" Roesch asked.

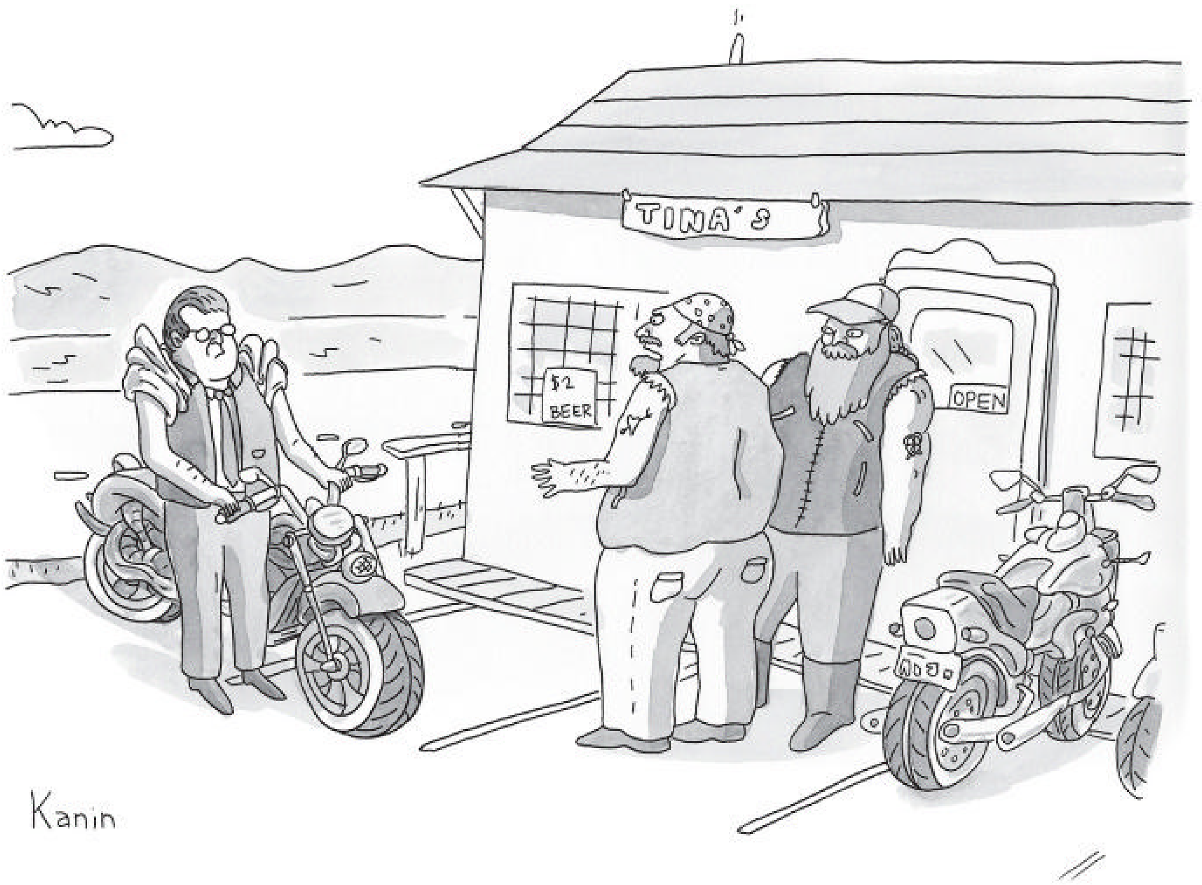
On the sidelines, I fished through my tote bag, and surreptitiously tried to put a piece of gum in my mouth. Roesch, who had moved on to scratching at a block of foam tucked inside a metal suitcase, which was draped with a bomber jacket, turned to me between takes. "Lotta good props in your handbag," he said, pointedly.

Skywalker Sound is owned by Disney, though about half of its Foley artists' work is for outside clients. Disney has long been accused of being a near-monopoly in the film industry, and its blockbuster factory relies heavily on sequels, prequels, remakes, and extensions of its franchises. These are all immensely profitable, but that doesn't necessarily mean that they are good. Still, Disney is one of the few places that employ full-time Foley teams. There is an element of precariousness to the profession, particularly as recording and editing software, such as Pro Tools, has allowed the richness of certain sounds to be approximated through digital layering. Many Foley artists now work as independent contractors, rather than in-house, despite the growing number of projects that require their talents, from shows on streaming platforms to video games.

Driving home over the Golden Gate Bridge, I thought about the way corporations can ensnare even the most delicate and specific of crafts—and the juxtaposition of expensive, mediocre entertainment and the personal, meticulous work that goes into them. I was indifferent to Buzz Lightyear and had no interest in seeing an animated film giving the origin story of a fictional toy. Yet it had been thrilling to watch the characters come to life—to emerge from silence into fully realized sonic beings, the way that static on an old television set might arrange itself into distinct images. In any case, the craft's aesthetic ideal isn't beauty but believability.

A few weeks later, my household received a visit from a relative who is six years old and likes buttons. He came into our home and inspected the appliances. As my husband showed him how to operate the espresso machine, our small relative added his own vocalized sound effects: whirs, purrs, pew-pews, ka-chinks. These were the kinds of mechanical sound that exist almost exclusively in the realm of fantasy—more like comic-book rocket launches than like the Bunsen-burner hiss of actual space shuttles—and I assumed they came from his preferred entertainment vehicles, such as "Peppa Pig" and "Cars." In "The Soundscape of Modernity: Architectural Acoustics and the Culture of Listening in America, 1900-1933," Thompson, the historian of technology, writes, "Like a landscape, a soundscape is simultaneously a physical environment and a way of perceiving that environment; it is both a world and a culture constructed to make sense of that world." The soundscapes of cartoon hyperreality were the soundscapes my relative was familiar with, and he sought to re-create them in the world around him—to make things more legible, perhaps, or just more fun. It was as if he were adding his own sweeteners to reality.

Sound is a way to interpret and imagine the world—invisibly, and on a near-subterranean level. Much of cinematic



"Look, Dennis, if you're serious about being in this gang, you need to rip off those sleeves for real."

sound is in service to a real feeling, but, in the face of feeling, sheer realism fails. For the cinematic release of 1979's "Apocalypse Now," Walter Murch, a film editor and sound designer, added a channel of infrasound—sound waves at a frequency below the threshold of human audibility—to vibrate viewers' chest cavities. Murch is renowned for his impressionistic sound design, what he calls "metaphoric" audio: a sensuous, sonic ambiguity, intended to stimulate the imagination and act on a near-subconscious level. "Sound sneaks up on you," he told me. "You are less consciously aware of it than when you look at something. That actually gives us who work in sound a great power, because we can influence how people experience things, without them being aware of it." In "The Godfather," he famously layered the sound of an elevated subway train over a scene in which Michael Corleone, played by Al Pacino, murders a rival at a quiet Italian restaurant in the Bronx. The train rumbles and screeches in the background as Michael girds himself for the hit. "We're using it creatively, in a musical sense, to get at something about Michael's interior state," Murch said. "There's nothing visual that says there should be an elevated train here, so the audience feels a certain something, and yet they ascribe it to the acting talents of Al Pacino."

Lynch described sound design as an intuitive process, one that relied on both experimentation and precision. "Let's say there's a woman sitting, and she's sewing a little decal onto a sweater for her daughter. Her daughter's sleeping in the other room. It's late at night. It's very dim light. She's close, making stitches. Coming into her house unbeknown to her is a man who's broken in and he's coming upstairs from the basement. And he's listening. And she, upstairs, is setting the scissors down on this sewing machine, this metal part, and it makes a little click, and he hears this little click, and he starts going up the stairs, and the stairs are carpeted, so it's real quiet. Very, very quiet. . . . Every moment is do or die! You've gotta guide this whole massive thing for two hours plus. Everything is critical."

For all the advances in audio technologies, the fundamentals of making Foley have largely escaped the spectre of digitization. "I feel like a shoe cobbler," Jana Vance, a Foley artist, told me. "We're still making things with our hands, or with our feet." Attempts to automate the work of Foley artists, such as SoundDroid, from the eighties, or AutoFoley, from 2020, tend to produce sounds that don't compare. Roesch suggested that computer-generated sound effects could someday be as good as computer-generated imagery, particularly with the help of a human operator. "The A.I. will look at footsteps, look at the signal, and make recommendations," he speculated. It wasn't a future he seemed to relish. "The bottom line is, the beauty of Foley is its originality and soul," he said. "Each cue, each footstep, even, has the potential for beauty." Vance said, "I've done Harrison Ford for a few different films. I know how he moves, I know his footsteps. Whenever I get him, I look forward to revisiting my character again." Software does not have this intuition.



Today's real-world soundscapes are rich with the thrums and hiccups of digital technology: chirping cell phones, irate laptop fans, the unsettling, quiet whine of electric vehicles. There are humming electrical cables and clicking traffic lights and the well-intended hush of white-noise machines. There are drones, and G.P.S., and the ambient sounds of A.T.M.s and automatic doors and air-conditioners and hot-water heaters. There is Alexa. In certain remote, rural areas, residents can register the low vibration of far-off server farms. Container ships generate underwater noise. The world is getting louder. The same is true onscreen: C.G.I. has multiplied the number of visuals that require sound effects. "We have to create all these sounds that have never been created before," Roden said. "Like Transformers, and anything in Marvel movies. Thanos—his glove, his gauntlet. Magical details, dust." Vance said, "Things have really drifted from the natural world. Everything has to be a little bit bolder, a little bit bigger. You have all these monsters, often—they'll want things from us, like the skin movement, claws."

Theatres now have higher-fidelity sound systems: Dolby's widely used Atmos system has more than a hundred channels of sound, routed through as many as sixty-four speakers. Audiences have become accustomed to hearing all the details. " 'Dunkirk,' I had earplugs on," Roden said. "I worked on 'Dunkirk.' " She made a noise—a kind of *mnnh*—in imitation of movie-theatre subwoofers. It sounded like getting passed by a tractor trailer on the freeway. "The low end affects me viscerally—I actually get sick to my stomach," she said. Roden prefers to watch movies made in the forties, the fifties, and the sixties—bank heists, jailbreaks, and French film noir. She had recently watched Jean-Pierre Melville's "Le Samouraï," from 1967. Many of the film's sound effects were recorded during production, on the same track as the dialogue. "The men's shoes are made of a different material, and you hear them echoing off these alleyways," Roden said. "The grit on their feet—so nasty. It sounds like they're wearing women's shoes, they're very high-pitched. But it works so great for this gritty, film-noir French movie. I love it. Love that film. But to do it today—oh, my gosh, I would probably be fired."

During the spring, as I spoke with Foley artists and watched them at work, I grew increasingly attuned to the various elements of soundscapes around me: the clicking scramble of gravel, the thud of a bag of frozen strawberries, the soft shuffle of a pregnant friend, the syncopated hop of a three-legged bichon frise. Though I am not an audile, I appreciated the chance to experience my surroundings with a different quality of consciousness. In the studio at Skywalker Sound, watching Roesch and Roden perfect footsteps for the characters in "Lightyear"—adjusting the tone and emotion by shifting their weight, moving from the sides to the soles of their shoes, the elegance and precision, like tap-dancing in slow motion—I ascended to an almost hallucinatory level of attention. Movies felt richer, sometimes to the point of distraction; a showing of "Everything Everywhere All at Once" felt like a maximalist sound bath. It wasn't until I was on a plane, watching "Roman Holiday," its quiet, nineteen-fifties plaza café augmented by the fizzes and snaps of the inflight beverage service, that I realized the greatest complement to Foley: silence. ♦

LETTER FROM BUDAPEST

THE ILLIBERAL ORDER

Does Hungary offer a glimpse of our authoritarian future?

BY ANDREW MARANTZ

The Republican Party hasn't adopted a new platform since 2016, so if you want to know what its most influential figures are trying to achieve—what, exactly, they have in mind when they talk about an America finally made great again—you'll need to look elsewhere for clues. You could listen to Donald Trump, the Party's de-facto standard-bearer, except that nobody seems to have a handle on what his policy goals are, not even Donald Trump. You could listen to the main aspirants to his throne, such as Governor Ron DeSantis, of Florida, but this would reveal less about what they're for than about what they're against: overeducated élites, apart from themselves and their allies; "wokeness," whatever they're taking that to mean at the moment; the overzealous wielding of government power, unless their side is doing the wielding. Besides, one person can tell you only so much. A more efficient way to gauge the current mood of the Party is to spend a weekend at the Conservative Political Action Conference, better known as CPAC.

On a Friday in February, I arrived at the Rosen Shingle Creek resort, in Orlando. It was a temperate afternoon, and the Party faithful were spending it indoors, in the air-conditioning. I walked into a rotunda with potted palm trees and chaotically patterned carpeting. Shabbat services were about to begin, and a minyan of young men, give or take, roamed around in MAGA-themed yarmulkes. The CPAC dress code was big-tent: pants suits, sweatsuits, bow ties, bolos—anything, pretty much, except for an N95. A merch kiosk near the entrance sold Nancy Pelosi toilet paper, gold-sequinned purses shaped like handguns, and Trump 2024 T-shirts in every size and color. Even the staircases were sponsored—one by Fox News and another by Gettr, a social-media platform founded by Trump-campaign alumni. If you aligned yourself with it at just the right vantage, you could parse Gettr's slogan, "Making Social Media Fun Again!" Otherwise, it looked like red-white-and-blue gibberish.

Political rallies are for red-meat applause lines; think-tank conferences are for more measured policy discussions. The American Conservative Union, the group that organizes CPAC, tries to have it both ways. On Saturday, I spent a while in the main ballroom, watching a panel called "Put Him to Bed, Lock Her Up and Send Her to the Border." "Him" referred to Joe Biden, "the hair-sniffing dementia patient in the White House"; the first "her," of course, was Hillary Clinton; the second was Kamala Harris, who was lambasted as both an "empty pants suit" and a wily "Cersei Lannister." That afternoon, Trump arrived, hosted a V.I.P. gathering featuring a spread of Big Macs under heat lamps, and took the stage, giving a ninety-minute stump speech to an ecstatic crowd, all but confirming his intention to run for President again.

The policy discussions were mainly tucked away upstairs, in conference rooms with a tiny fraction of the foot traffic. One panel, on European populism, was called "More Brexits?" The moderator, an American named James Carafano, introduced the first speaker: Miklós Szánthó, the director of a Hungarian think tank called the Center for Fundamental Rights. (According to Átlátszó, an investigative-journalism outlet in Hungary, the Center for Fundamental Rights is secretly funded by the Hungarian government.) "He's a real European," Carafano, a foreign-policy analyst at the Heritage Foundation, said. "I know that because I saw him in Europe!"

For decades, at conferences like CPAC, international exchanges were mostly assumed to flow in one direction: Americans exporting their largesse, and their ideology, to the rest of the world. At the first CPAC, in 1974, the keynote speaker, Governor Ronald Reagan, gave



"Why are we doing this?" Miklós Szánthó,



an organizer of CPAC *Hungary, said. "We are doing this to make the liberals' nightmare true."*

ILLUSTRATION BY TYLER COMRIE

a rousing address about soldiers who had shed their "American-melting-pot blood in every corner of the world, usually in defense of someone's freedom." In recent years, as the future of the Republican Party has seemed increasingly up for grabs, American conservatives have shown more willingness to look abroad for ideas that they might want to try out back home.

Szánthó, a stout man with a smartly tailored suit and a waxed mustache, began by quibbling with the panel's title. "There will be no so-called *Huxit*," he said, despite his country's disagreements with "the deep state of Brussels." Szánthó lives in Hungary, but he spoke fluent Fox News-inflected English. "When it comes to border protection, when it comes to the Jewish-Christian heritage of the Continent and of the European Union, or when it comes to gender ideology," he continued, the Hungarians, nearly alone among citizens of Western nations, "step up for conservative values."

Hungary has a population comparable to Michigan's and a G.D.P. close to that of Arkansas, but, in the imagination of the American right, it punches far above its weight. Viktor Orbán, the Prime Minister since 2010, is now the longest-serving head of state in the European Union, and one of the most fiercely nativist and traditionalist. Starting in 2013, he made a political foil out of George Soros, the Jewish financier who was born in Hungary but hasn't lived there in decades, exploiting the trope of Soros as a nefarious international puppet master. During the refugee crisis of 2015, Orbán built a militarized fence along Hungary's southern border, and, in defiance of both E.U. law and the Geneva Conventions, expelled almost all asylum seekers from the country. Relative to other European nations, Hungary hadn't experienced a big influx of migrants. (Out-migration is actually more common.) But the refugees, most of them from Syria or other parts of the Middle East, were an effective political scapegoat—one that Orbán continues to flog, along with academics, "globalists," the Roma, and, more recently, queer and trans people. Last year, Hungary passed a law banning sex education involving L.G.B.T.Q. topics in schools. Nine months later, in Florida, DeSantis signed a similar law, known as the "Don't Say Gay" bill. DeSantis's press secretary, talking about the inspiration for the law, reportedly said, "We were watching the Hungarians."

Experts have described Orbán as a new-school despot, a soft autocrat, an anocrat, and a reactionary populist. Kim Lane Scheppele, a professor of international affairs at Princeton, has referred to him as "the ultimate twenty-first-century dictator." Some prominent American conservatives want nothing to do with him; but more have taken his side, pointing to Hungary as a potential model for America's future. That afternoon, on the CPAC main stage, Dan Schneider, the executive director of the American Conservative Union, singled out Orbán for praise: "If you cannot protect your own borders, if you cannot protect your own sovereignty, none of the other rights can be protected. That's what the Prime Minister of Hungary understands." The house lights dimmed and a sort of political trailer played, set to melodramatic music. "For over a millennium, to be Hungarian meant to sail the rough seas of history," a narrator intoned over a horror-movie-style montage: Mongol invaders, migrant caravans, a glowering George Soros, drag-queen story time.

The lights came up, and Szánthó walked to the lectern, waving stiffly. "Hungary has fought wars, suffered unthinkable oppression, to gain and regain our liberty," he said. In the current war, he went on, the enemy was "woke totalitarianism," personified by George Soros (he paused for boos); the hero was "one of the true champions of liberty, a man you know well, Prime Minister Viktor Orbán" (a generous round of applause). He praised "President Trump" and tried to initiate a cheer of "Let's go Brandon," a substitute for "Fuck Joe Biden" used by right-wing culture warriors who spend too much time on the Internet. He quoted the old chestnut "Hard times create strong men," although, the way he said it, it sounded like "strongmen." And he invited the audience to join him at the next CPAC conference, the first to be hosted on European soil: CPAC Hungary.



"You do not have to have emergency powers or a military coup for democracy to wither," Aziz Huq, a constitutional-law professor at the University of Chicago, told me. "Most recent cases of backsliding, Hungary being a classic example, have occurred through legal means." Orbán runs for reëlection every four years. In theory, there is a chance that he could lose. In practice, he has so thoroughly rigged the system that his grip on power is virtually assured. The political-science term for this is "competitive authoritarianism." Most scholarly books about democratic backsliding ("The New Despotism," "Democracy Rules," "How Democracies Die") cite Hungary, along with Brazil and Turkey, as countries that were consolidated democracies, for a while, before they started turning back the clock.

Szánthó mentioned "Jewish-Christian heritage," but there aren't many practicing Jews left in Hungary. Orbán, in his speeches, often uses the phrase "Christian democracy," which he portrays as under continual existential threat. Given that the vast majority of Hungarians, apparently including Orbán, do not attend church regularly, it seems plausible that his audience hears the word "Christian," at least in part, as code for something else. "If we manage to uphold our country's ethnic homogeneity and its cultural uniformity," he said in 2017, "Hungary will be the kind of place that will be able to show other, more developed countries what they lost." His constant theme is that only he can preserve Hungary for the (non-Muslim, ethnically Magyar) Hungarians—about as close as any European head of state will come to an explicit rejection of ethnic pluralism in favor of state-sanctioned white nationalism. For many of his American admirers, this seems to be a core element of his appeal. Lauren Stokes, a professor of European history at Northwestern University, told me, "The offer Orbán is making to global conservatives is: I alone can save you from the ravages of Islamization and totalitarian progressivism—and, in the face of all that, who has time for checks and balances and rules?"

In recent years, Orbán or institutions affiliated with his government have hosted, among others, Mike Pence, the former Vice-President; new-media agitators including Steve Bannon, Dennis Prager, and Milo Yiannopoulos; and Jeff Sessions, the former Attorney General, who told a Hungarian newspaper that, in the struggle to "return to our Christian roots based on reason and law, which have made Western civilization great . . . the Hungarians have a solid stand." In his hilltop office with an imposing two-story library, Orbán has met with conservative figures including Patrick Deneen and Jordan Peterson. "If these people think the extreme left is hijacking American society in dangerous ways, then, yes, I agree," the conservative writer Andrew Sullivan told me. "But to go from that to 'Let's embrace this authoritarian leader in this backwater European country, and maybe try out a version of that model with our own charismatic leader back home'—I mean, that leap is just weird, and frankly stupid."



"Are you sure you want a jury of your peers?"

In Orlando, I followed the energy of the crowd to media row, where Sebastian Gorka, a bellicose conspiracy barker with a Vandyke beard, was doing a live broadcast of his radio show, "America First." In the nineties and early two-thousands, Gorka was a Hungarian politician and government adviser; in 2017, he served as a counterterrorism adviser in the Trump Administration, focussing on "radical Islamist ideology." (He did not have the credentials that most comparable appointees have held; he had, however, worn a medal from the Order of Vitéz, a Hungarian military society historically associated with the Nazis.) "What would you like to hear from tomorrow's speech by the President?" he asked Representatives Matt Gaetz and Marjorie Taylor Greene. (He meant, of course, Trump, whom he generally referred to as "my former boss.") Greene replied, "I want to hear him say that his entire policy, his entire agenda, is for our country, our country only, and the rest of the world can frankly go to hell." Gorka, who was born in London to Hungarian parents, said, "I like that menu." He dismissed Gaetz and Greene and introduced his next "big-ticket guest": Kyle Rittenhouse. Later, I ran into Gorka, who was now wearing a tuxedo, and asked him for an interview. He declined. (To be specific, he shouted, "Go to hell, scumbag," and "You're smoking crack.")

I saw him the next day in the V.I.P. lounge, near a spread that was both lavish and pedestrian: silver, scalloped carafes of coffee with Starbucks to-go cups; a tureen of lukewarm fettuccine Alfredo. (My press pass did not technically allow me access to the V.I.P. lounge, but CPAC, as it turned out, did not have very tight border security.) A graffiti-style portrait of Trump hugging and kissing an American flag, just auctioned off for more than twelve thousand dollars, was propped against a cardboard box and a pile of plastic wrap, waiting to be shipped to the lucky winner. J. D. Vance, a former anti-Trump venture capitalist who had rebranded himself as a pro-Trump salt-of-the-earth Senate candidate, chatted with Eric Bolling, a news anchor who left Fox News amid allegations of sexual harassment, which he denied, and was later hired by Newsmax. The pro-Brexit politician Nigel Farage waited in the buffet line next to Devin Nunes, a former member of Congress who now runs Trump's struggling media company. Father Frank Pavone, a Catholic priest wearing his clerical collar, chatted with Todd Starnes, a pundit whose Fox News contract wasn't renewed after he appeared to endorse the view that Democrats may worship Moloch, the Canaanite god associated with child sacrifice. "The networking here is amazing!" Pavone said.

In the hallway, I shook hands with Szánthó and Schneider, the two lead organizers of CPAC Hungary, and told them that I planned to fly to Budapest to cover it. "You will be welcome," Szánthó said. "Please just send an e-mail." One of the speakers on the European-populism panel had been Raymond Ibrahim, an independent scholar from California who contributes to a variety of right-wing outlets, usually to argue that Islam is a global scourge. "The word 'multiculturalism,' it sounds nice, but what is exactly the culture?" he said during the panel. "Things like polygamy . . . or killing the apostate . . . these are the culture of Islam." Ibrahim exchanged phone numbers with Gorka, and they later started texting, as Ibrahim told me, "mostly about Islam, and about how Hungary's fighting back." A few days after the conference, Gorka, on his show, interviewed the chairman

of the A.C.U., who plugged CPAC Hungary. "It's no longer about policies," Gorka said, paraphrasing something another conservative leader had told him at CPAC. "Now, as a movement, we have to take back the Republic, and we have to take back our civilization."

I got to Budapest on May 16th, the day Viktor Orbán was sworn in for his fourth consecutive term as Prime Minister. "Congratulations to him," a Hungarian journalist named Gábor Miklósi said. "What an achievement." This was sarcasm—a dark, dense form of sarcasm, polished from years of use.



We were having a beer at a "ruin bar" in what is still known as the Jewish district, a neighborhood that the Nazis turned into a ghetto in 1944. (In the course of two months, with the collaboration of the Hungarian government, the Nazis deported nearly half a million Jews from this ghetto to Auschwitz; others were later lined up on the banks of the Danube and shot.) Miklósi—slightly stooped, perennially tired—is an editor at 444, one of the few independent news outlets left in Hungary. "He controls most of the national papers, most of the radio and TV stations, all the local papers in the countryside," Miklósi said. "He doesn't do it in obvious ways—he does it slowly, by putting his cronies in charge, or by subtly making life difficult for his critics. But eventually he gets what he wants." The "he," of course, was Orbán, who is, like all despots, his country's default antecedent, the implied subject of virtually every sentence.

From the nineteen-fifties through the nineteen-eighties, during the period when Hungary was within the Soviet sphere of influence, Moscow allowed it a bit more latitude than other Eastern Bloc countries, a unique mixture of subjection and relative exemption that came to be known as Goulash Communism. As the Iron Curtain began to lift, Orbán emerged as a leader of the youth resistance, giving impassioned speeches against totalitarianism; in 1989, he went to Oxford to study political philosophy, on George Soros's dime. During his first term as Prime Minister, starting in 1998, Orbán, who still identified as a liberal democrat, vowed to build up the country's civic infrastructure. President Bill Clinton hosted him at the White House, extolling Orbán's "youthful and vigorous and progressive leadership." Then, in 2002, Orbán lost a reëlection campaign to a Socialist coalition and, according to the biographer József Debreczeni, resolved to return to power and change "the rules of the game" so that he would never lose again.

He enlisted Arthur Finkelstein, a political consultant from Brooklyn who had worked to elect Jesse Helms, Strom Thurmond, and Ronald Reagan, among others. "Try to polarize the election around that issue which cuts best in your direction, i.e., drugs, crime, race," Finkelstein wrote in a 1970 memo to the Nixon White House. In 1996, Finkelstein put this principle to work on behalf of Benjamin Netanyahu, a candidate for Prime Minister of Israel who was then about twenty points down in the polls, and who started alleging that his opponent, Shimon Peres, planned to divide Jerusalem. This was a lie, but it stuck, and Netanyahu won. In 2008, Netanyahu introduced Finkelstein to his friend Orbán; Finkelstein became so indispensable that Orbán reportedly came to refer to him, dotingly, as Finkie. One of Finkelstein's protégés later told the Swiss journalist Hannes Grassegger, "Arthur always said that you did not fight against the Nazis but against Adolf Hitler." Orbán had been running against globalism, multiculturalism, bureaucracy in Brussels. These were abstractions. By 2013, Finkelstein had an epiphany: the face of the enemy should be George Soros.

After Orbán returned to power, his rhetoric grew more sharply nativist, laden with Islamophobic and anti-Semitic dog whistles: "We are fighting an enemy that is different from us. Not open but hiding; not straightforward but crafty; not honest but base; not national but international; does not believe in working but speculates with money." In 2018, several parties to the left of Orbán's, and even a couple of neo-Fascist parties to his right, ran separate candidates for Prime Minister, splitting the opposition vote. "After that, the common narrative was that next time all we had to do was unite behind one opposition candidate, and we would definitely win," Szilárd Pap, a left-wing writer, told me. "Well, we did unite the next time, and we lost even worse." In Budapest, I met plenty of Hungarians who openly railed against their government. One was Péter Márki-Zay, the opposition candidate in the most recent election. Márki-Zay continues to accuse Orbán of corruption and mendacity, and he doesn't seem worried that his sushi will be poisoned with polonium. The regime's defenders see this relative freedom as evidence that all the talk of autocracy is reckless alarmism. Its critics see it as evidence of a cost-benefit decision: certain egregious breaches are not worth the trouble, at least for now.

"Orbán has managed to preserve the appearance of formal democracy, as long as you don't look too closely," Anna Grzymala-Busse, the director of the Europe Center at Stanford, told me. Since 2010, most of Hungary's civic institutions—the courts, the universities, the systems for administering elections—have come to occupy a gray area. They haven't been eradicated; instead, they've been patiently debilitated, delegitimatized, hollowed out. There are still judges who wear robes, but if Orbán finds their decisions too onerous he can appeal to friendlier courts. There are still a few independent universities, but the most prestigious one—Central European University, which was founded by Soros—has been pushed out of the country, and many of the public universities have been put under the control of oligarchs and other loyalists. There are still elections, yet international observers consider them "free but not fair": radically gerrymandered, flush with undisclosed infusions of dark money. The system that Orbán has built during the past twelve years, a combination of freedom and subjugation not exactly like that of any other government in the world, could be called Goulash Authoritarianism. Scheppele contends that Orbán has pulled this off not by breaking laws but by ingeniously manipulating them, in what she calls a "constitutional coup." She added, "He's very smart and methodical. First, he changes the laws to give himself permission to do what he wants, and then he does it."

On the day I arrived, Orbán deliv-

ered a forty-five-minute speech in a gilded neo-Gothic chamber of the Hungarian Parliament Building, warning that Europe was entering "an age of danger," and that Hungary, "the last Christian conservative bastion of the Western world," was one of the only nations prepared to weather it. He predicted that, given the pandemic, the war in Ukraine, and an incipient energy crisis, "migration toward rich countries will intensify with tectonic force." If other Western nations continued to implement "waves of suicidal policy," such as lax border control, the result would be "the great European population-replacement program, which seeks to replace the missing European Christian children with migrants, with adults arriving from other civilizations"—a clear reference to the racist talking point known as the great replacement theory. A few years ago, this idea was propounded most visibly by white-power extremists such as the Norwegian mass murderer Anders Breivik (or, more recently, the shooter in Buffalo). It's now routinely parroted by the Fox News host Tucker Carlson, many leading Republican politicians, and, in Hungary, the head of state.

In 2010, Fidesz, Orbán's party, won more than two-thirds of the seats in Parliament, above the threshold required to amend the constitution. Within a year, it had made a dozen amendments; when these didn't provide enough latitude, it threw out that constitution and wrote another one. In 2022, Fidesz won a supermajority once again. I asked Miklósi whether the next four years of Orbán's reign would be different from the last. "It always gets worse," he said. This time, he wasn't being sarcastic.

Of all the Anglophone Orbán apologists, surely the most genial, and arguably the most influential, is a British journalist named John O'Sullivan, who turned eighty in April. When William F. Buckley retired as the editor of *National Review*, in the eighties, O'Sullivan took over. During Margaret Thatcher's third term as Prime Minister, he was one of her top advisers; after she left office, he helped her write her memoirs. "Mrs. T. would take us on these lovely trips to various places—a manor in the South of England, a villa in the Bahamas—and we would talk over breakfast about some episode in her life, and then we'd each go off and write," he recalled. "It was great fun."

O'Sullivan had invited me to lunch at an Italian bistro near his apartment in Budapest. (He still fancies himself a classical liberal, at least insofar as "I'm always up for a good chat, even one that may involve disagreement.") He is known for knowing everyone, and he drops names with an equanimous smile, describing people on a spectrum from "a good friend" to "a friend" to "an ex-friend." He wore a pin-striped suit and a tie from Liberty, the London clothier once favored by Oscar Wilde. Even in this, O'Sullivan can't help but out-conservative the conservatives: "I prefer the older patterns, I confess, most of which they've now discontinued."

In 2008, O'Sullivan moved to Prague to help run Radio Free Europe; in 2013, two Hungarian friends, a "well-known modernist poet" and a "former teacher of Orbán's," hired him to start a conservative think tank. O'Sullivan and his wife, Melissa, have lived in Budapest ever since. "You really must meet Melissa," he told me. "She's an American—a proper American, from Alabama." A friend of the couple's told me, "Melissa is much more naturally Trumpy, in terms of her sympathies. John gets the Trump phenomenon intellectually, but he finds Trump too fickle and sort of gross." Orbán—a family man and an articulate lawyer who purports to set aside one workday a week exclusively for reading—is more to O'Sullivan's taste.

His think tank is called the Danube Institute. It is funded entirely by a foundation that is funded entirely by the Hungarian government. This foundation sponsors international conferences and three handsomely designed periodicals, all in English: *European Conservative*, *Hungarian Review*, and *Hungarian Conservative*. In 2015, O'Sullivan, dismayed by the anti-Orbán consensus among Western journalists and academics ("They all seem to be making the case for the prosecution, don't they?"), put together an essay collection of his own in which he wrote that "the death of liberal democracy in Hungary has been greatly exaggerated." After all, O'Sullivan and other apologists often argue, Orbán has a popular mandate. Rather than delegating gay rights, the handling of asylum claims, and other matters of domestic policy to international bodies—with their adherence to such abstractions as "the rule of law"—isn't it arguably *more* democratic to simply put them to a vote?

Even as the Hungarian constitution has been dismantled, O'Sullivan, Pangloss of the post-Soviet bloc, has continued to insist that Orbán is still basically a liberal democrat, if you squint. The problem with this sanguine view is that



"This is really boring—why can't we stake out from home?"

it has been repeatedly refuted, even by Orbán. "The new state that we are building in Hungary is an illiberal state," he declared in 2014. O'Sullivan told me that, as soon as he heard this, "the first thing I said to myself was 'I'm sure that isn't really what he meant.' A few weeks later, when I saw him for lunch at the Prime Minister's office, I told him straight out, 'You're going to regret saying that.' And, actually, I don't know that he has." At times, Orbán seems to mean "illiberal" in the partisan sense, as in owning the libs; often, he seems to mean it more sweepingly, expressing skepticism about a wide range of individual liberties. It's true, as the Orbánists like to point out, that Hungary is not the most repressive country in the world. China, Iran, Venezuela, North Korea—all are, by many measures, less free. But then there are no major political factions trying to make the United States more like North Korea.

During his first few years in Budapest, O'Sullivan had trouble generating interest in the Hungarian model of conservatism. "I went wherever I could—the Anglosphere Society, in New York, Grover Norquist's Wednesday Club, in Washington," he said. "The usual response was a yawn, basically. Until Brexit, and then Trump—and then, suddenly, people were open to radically different ideas." In 2020, the Danube Institute started hosting fellows—writers and scholars from abroad who were invited to Budapest for a few weeks or months, given a stipend and a comfortable apartment, and asked to work on articles or books that might help the cause. "We couldn't predict exactly what would come of it," O'Sullivan said. "You just put the billiard balls on the table, you know, and wait to see where they end up."

FRACTURE STORY

It was a beautiful place, horizon on all sides
like diner mirrors. I sped
toward its limit and hit the asphalt hard. My arm

in the X-ray glowed like a jellyfish at night
and I wanted to slip into its ocean and go
totally numb. I wanted

to fix what I'd done, but the doctor said
Stay patient, massaging my plaster
with soap. On the radio they spoke

about a meteor shower, so we spread old
towels in the darkest back yard. While we waited
someone laid out an endless riddle

about albatrosses. *Cannibalism* was the answer.
Inside me, minerals were mending themselves,
sending collagen threads across

The most dynamic billiard ball turned out to be Rod Dreher, a prolific American author who became a Danube Institute fellow in 2021. Dreher has long been a conservative and a Christian, but, within those traditions, he has experienced a number of mini-conversions. In a 2006 book, "Crunchy Cons," Dreher, then a kind of hipster exile from the Deep South, posited that conservatives ought to wear some of their cultural markers more lightly—that Republicans can shop at farmers' markets, too. In "The Benedict Option," in 2017, he argued that conservative Christians had already lost so many decisive political battles (same-sex marriage, abortion) that they should arrange a "strategic withdrawal" from the public sphere, building localist communities rather than contesting for national power. After his Danube Institute fellowship, though, he retreated from his retreatism: actually, conservatives could win real power, and Hungary could show the way. "Orbán was so unafraid, so unapologetic about using his political power to push back on the liberal élites in business and media and culture," Dreher told me. "It was so inspiring: this is what a vigorous conservative government can do if it's serious about stemming this horrible global tide of wokeness." By the time Orbán ran for reëlection earlier this year, Dreher had completed his transition from aspiring ascetic to partisan booster. "Mood here at Fidesz HQ is increasingly cheerful," he tweeted on Election Night. " 'Lights out, libs!' say Hungarian voters."

One April day in 2021, while Dreher was strolling through Budapest, he texted Tucker Carlson. "We text all the time, whenever I see something he might want to mention on his show, or just something he might find interesting," Dreher told me. Carlson knew what the Western media said about Orbán, but Dreher encouraged him to ignore it and come see for himself. "If somebody has all the right enemies, if the liberal establishment is obsessed with treating them as a hate object, then it's natural for a right-populist like me or Tucker to react by going, Huh, maybe there's something interesting there," Dreher said. Carlson told Dreher that he had already thought about visiting, but that he'd been encountering some bureaucratic hurdles with the Hungarian Embassy. A few days later, Dreher met Balázs Orbán—not related to Viktor, but one of his closest advisers. (Many Hungarians I spoke to described him as a sort of Karl Rove figure.) "I tried to convince Balázs that Tucker was somebody who could be trusted," Dreher recalled. He offered personal assurances that, on the big questions, Tucker and Orbán were in alignment. By the summer, the red tape had cleared. (Carlson declined to comment.)

On August 5th, Carlson anchored his show from a rooftop in central Budapest. Behind his left shoulder was an ornate stone façade, bathed in sunlight, and, beyond it, a bank of looming storm clouds. "Good evening and welcome to 'Tucker Carlson Tonight,'" he said. "Of

the bad chasm I'd made. From behind a wide cloud slid
stars like flecks of bone, old and glowing.
They held their breaths. When one dashed

across the black, I think I gasped
admiring the platonic plummet: it left
no fallen body. No broken heft.

In the morning I got up and walked
to the laundromat. Mountains ran
a cardiogram across the sky. Inside

two parts of me were reaching
toward each other—something I'd felt
before, but more in the mind. I started

to forgive myself. It
was a physical place. Hard
to be lonely carrying that slow embrace.

—*Nell Wright*

the nearly two hundred different countries on the face of the earth, precisely one of them has an elected leader who publicly identifies as a Western-style conservative. His name is Viktor Orbán." Carlson was spending the week in Budapest, delivering each day's American headline news in his selectively apoplectic style. "Representative democracy—it's been our system for nearly two hundred and fifty years," he said in one night's lead segment. "Apparently, it's now over." The ostensible cause of the death of American democracy was a temporary eviction moratorium enacted by the Centers for Disease Control. The next night, Carlson aired an obsequious one-on-one interview with Orbán—fifteen minutes without a single challenging question, and certainly no warnings about the potential death of Hungarian democracy.

Carlson's work vacation got a lot of press. Dreher defended him ("Tucker in Budapest: Blowing People's Minds"); Andrew Sullivan lambasted him ("The Price of Tucker Carlson's Soul: Going Cheap for a Corrupt, Fashy Kleptocrat"). Online sleuths followed the money. The Hungarian Embassy in Washington has had contracts with Connie Mack IV, a Republican former representative from Florida, and David Reaboi, a bodybuilder and former Andrew Breitbart protégé who touts his skills in "national security & political warfare." In 2019, the Embassy paid two hundred and thirteen thousand dollars to Policy Impact Communications, a D.C.-based P.R. firm staffed by well-connected lobbyists. One of its board members is Dick Carlson—the director of the Voice of America under Ronald Reagan, the Ambassador to the Seychelles under George H. W. Bush, and, as it happens, Tucker's father.

By the standards of sponsored diplomacy, though, a six-figure contract is hardly unusual. (In 2018, the government of Saudi Arabia paid American lobbyists more than thirty-eight million dollars.) Normally, six figures might buy you a full-page ad in the *Financial Times*, say, or help your ambassador secure a speaking slot at an obscure thought-leader conference; it's presumably not enough to get your head of state a long softball interview on one of the most popular shows on American TV. The payments surely don't hurt, but it seems that Carlson, Dreher, and O'Sullivan are true believers, exuding the contrarian thrill of forbidden knowledge. When I was in Budapest, Dreher, seven time zones away and in the midst of a messy divorce, texted me assiduously, including before 5 A.M. his time, trying to steer my story. "I really do care about Hungary, and I want to help you do a good job," he wrote. "God knows it's not paradise, but it's important to understand Hungary as it is." That's the sort of P.R. that money can't buy.

In some ways, Orbán conducts himself like any other strongman. He built a big soccer stadium in his small home town, and he loves to go there to watch the games. In the mid-two-thousands, Lőrinc Mészáros, one of Orbán's childhood friends, was a pipe fitter receiving welfare checks; shortly after Orbán returned to power, in 2010, Mészáros became the richest person in Hungary. This year, when Márki-Zay ran as the opposition candidate, he was given five minutes on TV to make his case to the voters, and the rest of the allotted time went to Orbán.

But, unlike Putin-style autocrats, Orbán is often keen to maintain plausible deniability. "He'll use such obscure methods that it might take months to figure out what he's done," Scheppele, the Princeton professor, told me. In 2010, Orbán established a relatively small antiterror police unit. Bit by bit, in disparate clauses buried in unrelated laws, he increased its budget and removed checks on its power. "I was reading Article 61 of a bill on public waterworks, literally, and I came across a line that said, Oh, by the way, the antiterror unit now gets to collect personal information on all water-utility customers, which basically means everyone in the country, without notifying them," Scheppele went on. She contends that the unit now functions, essentially, as Orbán's secret police. "His claim is always 'Everything I'm doing is legal'—well, of course it is, because you made it legal," she said. The goal, as the scholar John Keane puts it in his book "The New Despotism," is a kind of bureaucratic gaslighting: the ability to insist that what everyone knows is happening is not in fact happening.

I was experiencing a tiny microcosm of this while trying to register for CPAC Hungary. I had sent an e-mail, as instructed—then another, then another. Each time, I encountered a new bureaucratic hurdle: wait a week, call this phone number, try this link. The organizers maintained that the event would be



open to the press. "We are fighting for everyone's right to speak," Balázs Orbán, who was scheduled to appear at the conference, said in a radio interview. A few days later, I met him at a café where jaunty, self-help-y aphorisms had been written on each table in sidewalk chalk. ("Take others' opinions lightly—very lightly," our table read.) I asked him about the government's suppression of same-sex marriage and gay adoption. "If the state is pushing for the policy where the marriage is only between a man and a woman, and seventy per cent of the people want this, it's not tyranny of the majority," he said. The popularity is beside the point, I argued, if the policy is a violation of human rights. "According to my understanding, it's not," he said. When our conversation was done, he asked me to pose with him for a photo. I mentioned that I was having trouble getting into CPAC and asked if he would put in a good word with the organizers. His response, which I had to admit was quite clever, was that, as a government official, it would be improper for him to intervene.

Dreher assured me that there must be some innocent mixup. When I met O'Sullivan at his office, he agreed: "I'm sure it's merely an oversight." I told him that I had been in touch with journalists from the *Guardian*, *Rolling Stone*, Vice, and a range of independent Hungarian publications, none of whom had heard back from the CPAC organizers. A few hours later, all our requests were formally denied, and Vice published a piece titled "CPAC Just Decided to Not Let Any US Journalists Inside." In the American context, this sort of thing—for example, the Pennsylvania gubernatorial candidate Doug Mastriano banning press from a campaign rally—is still rare enough to raise eyebrows. In Hungary, it has become so commonplace that some reporters didn't even bother applying to CPAC. "They'll be very polite, and then at the last minute they'll tell you, 'We're so sorry, space constraints,'" another journalist told me. (When I sent an e-mail to the government's International Communications Office, asking to fact-check the relevant claims in this piece, the official response read, in part, "We appreciate the possibility you offered us, however, we do not wish to participate in the validation process of leftist-liberal propaganda.")

When I was about to leave O'Sullivan's office, he asked whether he would see me again that night, at the CPAC welcome reception. At this point, I couldn't tell whether I was being elaborately trolled. "I didn't get an invitation, but I'd love to go if I can," I said. "Where will it be?"

One of his staffers helpfully piped up: "Some hotel near the Elisabeth Bridge. The Paris something or other?"

On my way out, Googling frantically on my phone, I found a five-star hotel fitting this description: the Párizsi Udvar. I went back to my room (in a perfectly nice, decidedly not-five-star hotel) and grabbed a sports coat and a notebook. A few minutes later, I was standing outside the entrance to the Párizsi Udvar, not sure what to do next. "Event?" a white-gloved doorman asked. "Event? Event?" I nodded, and he ushered me inside.

The hotel's courtyard, a former shopping arcade covered with a vast stained-glass dome, was one of the most opulent interiors I've ever seen. There were marble columns, floors of intricate Moorish tilework, and glass display cases stocked with jeroboams of fancy champagne. (In the 2011 film version of "Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Spy," an M.I.6 agent is double-crossed by a Hungarian general, shot, and captured by Soviet spies. The scene was filmed in the courtyard of the Párizsi Udvar.) About two hundred people were there, holding drinks and sampling Hungarian-American-fusion finger food. I ran into O'Sullivan ("Ah, good, you made it!") and spotted Rick Santorum, the former Pennsylvania senator, who was due to appear on a panel with Eduardo Bolsonaro, the son of the Brazilian autocrat (and a scheduled speaker at the following American Conservative Union conference, CPAC Brazil). Candace Owens, the YouTube culture warrior and the author of "Blackout: How Black America Can Make Its Second Escape from the Democrat Plantation," leaned against the bar, visibly pregnant, as a crush of admirers lined up to shake her hand. (Her husband, George Farmer, the C.E.O. of the social network Parler, stood next to her, looking down at his phone.) I'd heard that, while Owens was in town, Viktor Orbán had requested a closed-door meeting with her and a few others in his book-

lined office, to discuss culture and politics. Owens later confirmed, in a CPAC promotional video, that she'd met with Orbán for about two hours: "It was really amazing. He's so on it."

Miklós Szánthó appeared on a dais, holding a microphone, and quieted the crowd. "Why are we doing this?" he said. "We are doing this to make the liberals' nightmare true." He addressed the Americans in the room: "We do hope that you can learn from us the political mind-set how to be a successful conservative, as we also learn from you, and from Ronald Reagan. As he put it so many years ago, 'We win, they lose.' That is what the Hungarian right has done."

Dan Schneider, the executive director of the A.C.U., told me that he was especially excited for CPAC Israel, coming up this July, in Tel Aviv. (I didn't know it at the time, but another speaker in Budapest would be an old political ally of Orbán's, Zsolt Bayer, a notorious Hungarian talk-show host who has used racist epithets for Black people, has referred to Roma people as "animals" who must be "stamped out," and has argued that the widespread anti-Semitism in twentieth-century Hungary was "understandable.") I also met Mark Krikorian, a severe immigration restrictionist whose American nonprofit, the Center for Immigration Studies, has been classified by the Southern Poverty Law Center as a hate group. "I can't get a speaking gig at an American CPAC to save my life, but I fly four thousand miles over here and I'm welcomed with open arms," Krikorian told me. I asked him if he was worried about being, as O'Sullivan had put it, "tarred with the brush of Orbánism." "What are they gonna do, call me an ultra-hate group?" Krikorian said. "Fuck them!"

After an hour or so, Schneider pulled me aside. "I haven't eaten dinner yet," he said. "You wanna get out of here?" We strolled aimlessly, eventually stopping at an upscale bistro in a picturesque square. I ordered the venison goulash; Schneider picked something called the Hungarian Rhapsody. He kept his phone next to his water glass, occasionally tapping out a text. Though he never said so outright, it seemed clear that he had the personal cell numbers of several Republican senators, perhaps a Supreme Court Justice or two, and presumably at least one ex- and potentially future President.

"So what do you make of the Hungary thing, really?" he had asked me earlier. I tried to answer honestly but also diplomatically. "Clearly," I began, "there are issues with the way Orbán wields state power."

"*Wields* state *power!*" Schneider said, spitting the words back in my face. "You make it sound so nefarious!" I brought up Hungary's not entirely independent judiciary. "Oh, so he appoints judges he likes," Schneider said, rolling his eyes. "Is that so different from what we do?" He meant to normalize Orbán's behavior, but I couldn't help interpreting it the other way around: the brazen opportunism of the Republican Party—for example, refusing to give a hearing to the opposition's judicial nominees, then ramming through its own, in obvious violation of precedent and basic fairness—did seem undeniably Orbán-esque. He called himself "a classical liberal," adding, "You can't secure individual liberty unless you secure national sovereignty first." I made the obvious rejoinder that Orbán, for one, clearly does not consider himself a classical liberal. "Well, maybe I just haven't read enough about it," Schneider said.

At dinner, he was midsentence when a man approached us and, without a word, grabbed Schneider's phone from the table and ran off. Before I could process what was happening, Schneider, a former track athlete, was already in pursuit. He slipped and fell, then got up and kept running, following the thief around a corner. By the time I caught up with them, Schneider had tackled the man and recovered his phone. We walked back to our table. "I think I broke a rib," Schneider said. "And I definitely scuffed my shoes, which were not cheap." The man followed a few yards behind us, shouting expletives, at one point even brandishing a brick. Eventually, the police came and took him away. "I'm so sorry," our waiter told us, in English, when we were seated again, catching our breath. "Nothing like that ever happens here. I am sure that this man was not really a Hungarian."

There was no single moment when the democratic backsliding began in Hungary. There were no shots fired, no tanks in the streets. "Orbán doesn't need to kill us, he doesn't need to jail us," Tibor Dessewffy, a sociology professor at Eötvös Loránd University, told me. "He just keeps narrowing the space of public life. It's what's happening in your country, too—the frog isn't boiling yet, but the water is getting hotter." He acknowledged that the U.S. has safeguards that Hungary does not: the two-party system, which might forestall a slide into perennial single-party rule; the American Constitution, which is far more difficult to amend. Still, it wasn't hard for him to imagine Americans a decade hence being, in some respects, roughly where the Hungarians are today. "I'm sorry to tell you, I'm your worst nightmare," Dessewffy said, with a wry smile. As worst nightmares went, I had to admit, it didn't seem so bad at first glance. He was sitting in a placid garden, enjoying a lemonade, wearing cargo shorts. "This is maybe the strangest part," he said. "Even my parents, who lived under Stalin, still drank lemonade, still went swimming in the lake on a hot day, still fell in love. In the nightmare scenario, you still have a life, even if you feel somewhat guilty about it."

Lee Drutman, a political scientist at Johns Hopkins, tweeted last year, "Anybody serious about commenting on the state of US democracy should start reading more about Hungary." In other words, not only can it happen here but, if you look at certain metrics, it's already started happening. Republicans may not be able to rewrite the Constitution, but they can exploit existing loopholes, replace state election officials with Party loyalists, submit alternative slates of electors, and pack federal courts with sympathetic judges. Representation in Hungary has grown less proportional in recent years, thanks to gerrymandering and other tweaks to the electoral rules. In April, Fidesz got fifty-four per cent of the vote but won eighty-three per cent of the districts. "At that level of malapportionment, you'd be hard pressed to find a good-faith political scientist who would call that country a true democracy," Drutman told me. "The trends in the U.S. are going very quickly in the same direction. It's completely possible that the Republican Party could control the House, the Senate, and the White House in 2025, despite losing the popular vote in every case. Is that a democracy?"

In 2018, Steve Bannon, after he was

fired from the Trump Administration, went on a kind of European tour, giving paid talks and meeting with nationalist allies across the Continent. In May, he stopped in Budapest. One of his hosts there was the XXI Century Institute, a think tank with close ties to the Orbán administration. "I can tell, Viktor Orbán triggers 'em like Trump," Bannon said onstage, flashing a rare smile. "He was Trump before Trump." After his speech, he joined his hosts for a dinner cruise on the Danube. (The cruise was captured in unreleased footage from the documentary "The Brink." Bannon's spokesperson stopped responding to requests for comment.) On board, Bannon met Miklós Szánthó, sipping a beer and watching the sun set, who mentioned that he ran a "conservative, center-right think tank" that opposed "N.G.O.s financed by the Open Society network."

"Oh, my God, Soros!" Bannon said. "You guys beat him up badly here." Szánthó accepted the praise with a stoic grin. Bannon went on, "We love to take lessons from you guys in the U.S."

In 2018, "Trump before Trump" was the highest compliment that Bannon could think to pay Orbán. In 2022, many on the American right are trying to anticipate what a Trump after Trump might look like. Orbán provides one potential answer. Even Trump's putative allies will admit, in private, that he was a lazy, feckless leader. They wanted an Augustus; they got a Caligula. In theory, Trump was amenable to dismantling the administrative state, to pushing norms and institutions beyond their breaking points, even to reaping the benefits of a full autocratic breakthrough. But, instead of laying out long-term strategies to wrest control of key levers of power, he tweeted, and watched TV, and whined on the phone about how his tin-pot insurrection schemes weren't coming to fruition. What would happen if the Republican Party were led by an American Orbán, someone with the patience to envision a semi-authoritarian future and the diligence and the ruthlessness to achieve it?

In 2018, Patrick Deneen's book "Why Liberalism Failed" was admired by David Brooks and Barack Obama. Last year, Deneen founded a hard-right Substack called the Postliberal Order, on which he argued that right-wing populists had not gone nearly far enough—that American conservatism should abandon its "defensive crouch." One of his co-authors wrote a post from Budapest, offering an example of how this could work in practice: "It's clear that Hungarian conservatism is not defensive." J. D. Vance has voiced admiration for Orbán's pro-natalist family policies, adding, "Why can't we do that here?" Rod Dreher told me, "Seeing what Vance is saying, and what Ron DeSantis is actually doing in Florida, the concept of American Orbánism starts to make sense. I don't want to overstate what they'll be able to accomplish, given the constitutional impediments and all, but DeSantis is already using the power of the state to push back against woke capitalism, against the crazy gender stuff." According to Dreher, what the Republican Party needs is "a leader with Orbán's vision—someone who can build on what Trumpism accomplished, without the egomania and the inattention to policy, and who is not afraid to step on the liberals' toes."



"C'mon, you said you wanted to spice it up."

In common parlance, the opposite of "liberal" is "conservative." In political-science terms, illiberalism means something more radical: a challenge to the very rules of the game. There are many valid critiques of liberalism, from the left and the right, but Orbán's admirers have trouble articulating how they could install a post-liberal American state without breaking a few eggs (civil rights, fair elections, possibly the democratic experiment itself). "The central insight of twentieth-century conservatism is that you work within the liberal order—limited government, free movement of capital, all of that—even when it's frustrating," Andrew Sullivan said. "If you just give away the game and try to seize as much power as possible, then what you're doing is no longer conservative, and, in my view, you're making a grave, historic mistake." Lauren Stokes, the Northwestern historian, is a leftist with her own radical critiques of liberalism; nonetheless, she, too, thinks that the right-wing post-liberals are playing with fire. "By hitching themselves to someone who has put himself forward as a post-liberal intellectual, I think American conservatives are starting to give themselves permission to discard liberal norms," Stokes told me. "When a Hungarian court does something Orbán doesn't like—something too pro-queer, too pro-immigrant—he can just say, 'This court is an enemy of the people,

I don't have to listen to it.' I think Republicans are setting themselves up to adopt a similar logic: if the system gives me a result I don't like, I don't have to abide by it."

On the morning after the reception, I arrived at the building where CPAC Hungary was being held—a glass-covered, humpbacked protuberance known as the Whale. Orbán was due to speak in thirty minutes. I walked up to an outdoor media-registration desk, where a Center for Fundamental Rights employee named Dóra confirmed that I would not be allowed to enter. "I have to get back to work now," she said, although there was no one else in line. She called over a security guard, who stood in front of me, blocking my view of the entrance, and demanded that I go "outside." I made the argument that we were already outside. Within five minutes, he was threatening to call the police. (The Center for Fundamental Rights later declined to comment on specific claims in this piece, writing, "Unfortunately there is a lot of fake news in the article.")

I texted Rod Dreher, who seemed to think that his allies were making a tactical mistake: surely, antagonizing journalists would make the coverage worse. He and Melissa O'Sullivan scrambled to find attendees willing to pop out between sessions and talk to me. I spoke with a friend of Dreher's, an urbane descendant of Hungarian aristocrats and a study in cultivated neutrality: "I am a businessperson, so I believe in the win-win-win, which means that no one is on the wrong side, ever, you see? No one is the Devil, even the Devil." Later, I talked to another friend of Dreher's, who, after chatting for a few minutes, said, "I've got one of these badges. Why don't you put it on, try to walk in, and see what happens?"

It was calmer than I'd expected inside the Whale. CPAC Orlando had been a manic circus of lib-triggering commotion; CPAC Hungary was less flashy, more focussed. Young volunteers wearing business suits passed out policy papers printed on thick stock. "He's made it in again!" John O'Sullivan said, smiling and clapping me on the shoulder. Schneider, who had spent much of our dinner disclaiming the most wild-eyed, conspiratorial members of his coalition, was now chatting with Jack Posobiec, who has made a career out of promoting election disinformation, child-groomer memes, and other bits of corrosive propaganda.

The speaker onstage was Gavin Wax, the twenty-seven-year-old president of the New York Young Republican Club. (For most of the twentieth century, the club endorsed liberal Republicans, but, after an internal coup in 2019, it endorsed both Trump and Orbán for reëlection.) There were about a hundred people in the audience, most of them listening to Wax through live translation on clunky plastic headsets. "Hungary has frequently become a target because it is a shining example of how easily the globalist agenda can be repelled," Wax said. "We demand nothing short of an American Orbánism. We accept nothing less than total victory!" From the outside, the Whale had looked vast, airy, translucent. Inside the main hall, there were various camera setups and artificial-lighting rigs but not a crack of sunlight.



Tucker Carlson recorded a message from his home studio in Maine. "I can't believe you're in Budapest and I am not," he said. "You know why you can tell it's a wonderful country? Because the people who have turned our country into a much less good place are hysterical when you point it out." Trump also sent a greeting by video: "Viktor Orbán, he's a great leader, a great gentleman, and he just had a very big election result. I was very honored to have endorsed him. A little unusual endorsement, usually I'm looking at the fifty states, but here we went a little bit astray." During his keynote address, Orbán said, "President Trump has undeniable merits, but nevertheless he was not reëlected in 2020." Fidesz, by contrast, "did not resign ourselves to our minority status. We played to win."

In 2002, when Orbán lost his first reëlection campaign, he left office, but neither he nor his followers ever really accepted the result. "The homeland cannot be in opposition," he said—in other words, he was still the legitimate representative of the Hungarian people, and no election result could change that. Trump, of course, has been perseverating on a similar theme for the past year and a half, and he, too, has a cultural movement, a media ecosystem, and a political party that will echo it. At CPAC Orlando, most of the speakers ritually invoked the shibboleth that Trump had actually won the 2020 election, despite all evidence. Several attendees told me that, if the Republicans had any backbone, they would win back the House in 2022, amass as much power as possible at the state level, and then do whatever it took to deliver the Presidency back to the Party in 2024. A free but not fair election, captured partisan courts, the institutions of democracy limping along in hollowed-out form—these seemed like telltale signs of early-stage Goulash Authoritarianism. Now here the Americans were, studying at Orbán's knee.

Trump may run in 2024, and he may win, fairly or unfairly. What worried me most, sitting in the belly of the Whale, was not the person of Donald Trump but a Republican Party that resembled Orbán's party, Fidesz, more by the month—increasingly comfortable with naked power grabs, with treating all political opposition as fundamentally illegitimate, with assuming that any checks on its dominance were mere inconveniences to be bypassed by any quasi-legalistic means. "There are many things that the Americans here want to learn from the Hungarians," Balázs Orbán had told me. "We're going to keep our heritage for ourselves, our Christian heritage, our ethnic heritage . . . that's what I think they want to say but they can't say, and so they point to someone who can say it. If they want us to play that role, we are fine with that." After I got back to the U.S., I spoke to Dreher, who mentioned that he was thinking about moving from Louisiana to Budapest, where he had been offered a job with the Danube Institute. "I really like the Hungarian people, and I think it could be useful to build a network of Christians and intellectuals who are thinking about the future," he said. "We in the West still have so much to learn." ♦

PROFILES

KEEPING FAITH

The gospel according to Mavis Staples.

BY DAVID REMNICK

Mavis Staples has been a gospel singer longer than Elizabeth II has worn the crown. During concerts, sometimes, she might take a seat and rest while someone in her band bangs out a solo for a chorus or two. No one minds. Her stage presence is so unfailingly joyful—her nickname is Bubbles—that you never take your eyes off her. Staples sings from her depths, with low moans and ragged, seductive growls that cut through even the most pious lyric. She is sanctified, not sanctimonious. In her voice, "Help Me Jesus" is as suggestive as "Let's Do It Again." When she was a girl, singing with her family ensemble, the Staple Singers, churchgoers across the South Side of Chicago would wonder how a contralto so smoky and profound could issue from somebody so young.

She is eighty-two. While singers a fraction of her age go to great lengths to preserve their voices, drinking magical potions and warming up with the obsessive care of a gymnast, she doesn't hold back. Time, polyps, and a casual disdain for preservation have conspired to narrow her range and sand down her old shimmer, but she is not about to hum lightly through a rehearsal. A little ginger tea and onward she goes. Singing is what connects her to the world.

Sly, sociable, and funny, Staples reminds you of your mother's most reliable and cheerful friend, the one who comes around with good gossip and a strawberry pie. Her cheeks are round and smooth; her hair is done in a copper bob; her resting expression is one of delight. "She is a ray of sunshine," Bonnie Raitt, her frequent touring companion, said. "She's never cranky. She has an abiding belief in God and His plan and believes the world is moving toward a higher and more loving world." Staples has spent the past few decades lending her voice to a startling range of collaborators: Prince, Arcade Fire, Nona Hendryx, Ry Cooder, David Byrne. Anyone who has something to say, she'll help them say it, in an inimitable gospel voice. One collaborator, Jeff Tweedy, of Wilco, said, "All day long, Mavis is having a good time. She's excited about making music and just being alive. I hope I have that energy when I'm her age, but the truth is I don't even have it now."

And yet life has its way of wearing down even the most radiant spirit. For two years, during the worst of the pandemic, Staples stayed home in Chicago—she lives in a modern high-rise overlooking Lake Michigan—and was, like just about everyone else in the music business, unable to perform or record. She watched cable news and saw the ravaging effect that COVID-19 was having on folks her age. She didn't go out, and she let no one in. For company, she'd pick up her phone and check in with "the Twitter people." The empty days went on and on. "Oh, man, I hated it," she said. There was only one thing left to do. "I'd start singing around the house. Mostly our old stuff, the songs we started singing when I was a kid: 'Didn't It Rain,' 'Help Me Jesus.'"

The pandemic was the least of it. The passage of time has relentlessly winnowed the comforts of her old life. For decades, she performed in the cocoon of a family that was remarkably warm, loving, and coöperative. Compared with the Jacksons, the Turners, or the Beach Boys, the Staple Singers is a story free of dark drama. But now the other members of Mavis Staples's family—her father, Roebuck; her mother, Oceola; her brother, Pervis; her sisters, Cleotha, Cynthia, and Yvonne—are gone. "It's just me now," she said. She's left with memories of a bygone world: backyard barbecues at the Staples place, with Redd Foxx, Aretha Franklin, and Mahalia Jackson piling their plates with ribs and creamed corn; starlit rides in the family Cadillac, touring the gospel capitals of the Deep South; singing "Why? (Am I Treated So Bad)" at rallies before Martin Luther King, Jr., delivered an oration. "Ghosts," as Staples put it to me one day. "So many ghosts."

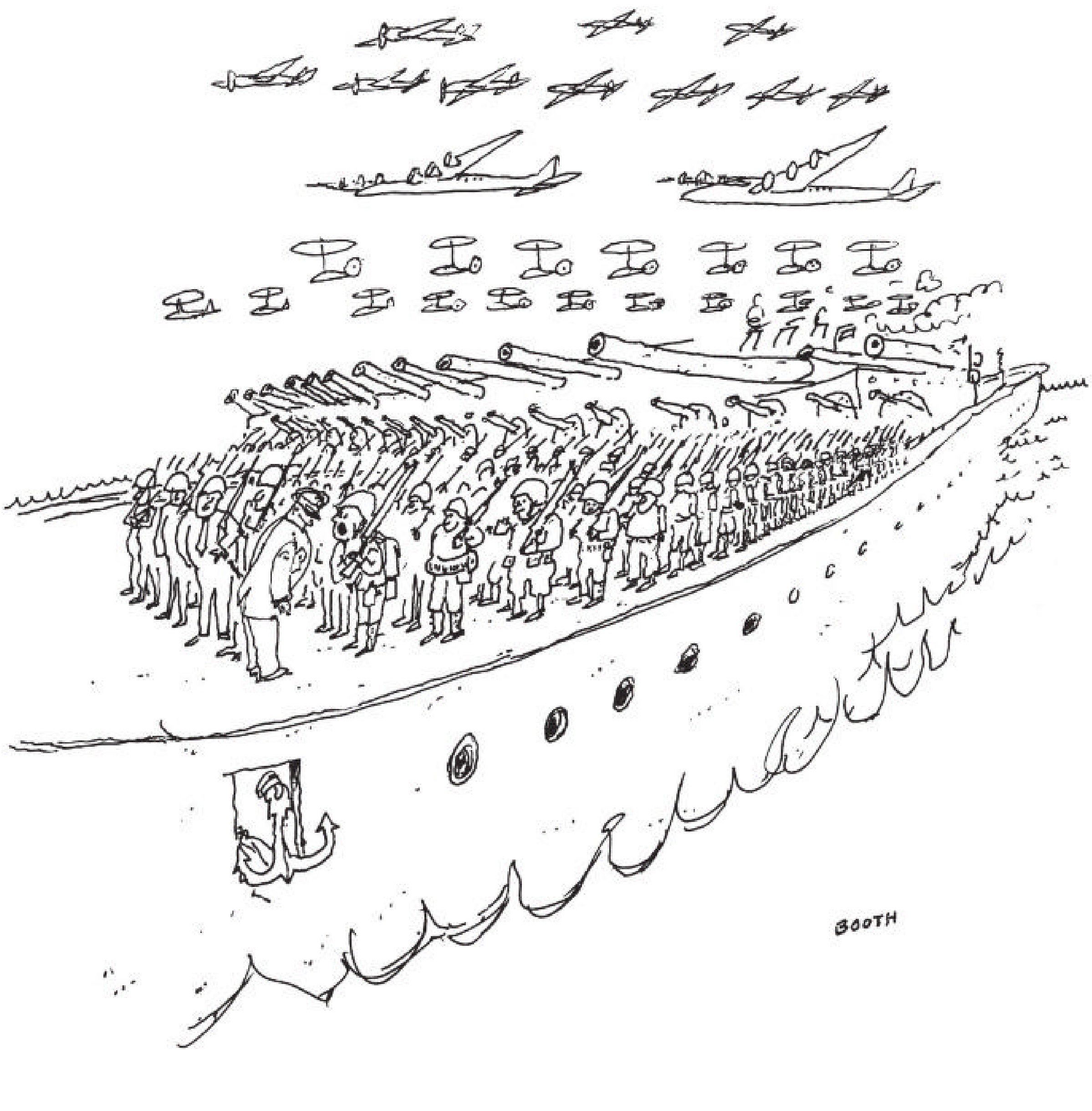
We were having lunch at a restaurant downstairs from her apartment, and Staples was saying that even now she dreams about her family. Like anyone of a certain age, she has a quarry of stories she mines to explain the shape of her life. She tells these stories expertly, as if each time were the first. She is an entertainer, after all. But, when the matter of loss comes up, there is no sense of performance. She takes a deep breath and lets herself settle, as if to say, This is the important thing about me. Her father—everyone called him Pops—died in 2000, just after the Staple Singers were inducted into the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame. She still misses him, she says, so much that he shows up in her dreams to give her advice: "And, when I wake up, I be so mad that it was just a dream!" Pops, a son of the Mississippi Delta, was the paterfamilias, soft-spoken and kind. He sang, wrote songs, assembled the set lists, booked the dates, ran the business. The sole instrumentalist in the group, he played a bluesy Fender guitar, surrounding the vocal lines with a spare, tremolo sound. For years, his absence onstage left Staples feeling adrift. "I was having a hard time," she said. "I didn't hear Daddy's guitar."

Staples tried singing alone for a while, with a hired band of musicians, and she let her sister Yvonne, who



At eighty-two, Staples asked God why she was still alive. "The only reason I could see is to sing my songs," she said.

PHOTOGRAPH BY PAOLA KUDACKI



"I don't like to tattle, but Pfc. Dinny Hodge, Second Battalion, Fox Company Third Platoon, Second Squad, Fourth Fire Team is carrying leftover toast, canned beans, and a partly eaten apple in his Browning automatic-rifle magazine vest, instead of his ammo, sir."

• •

never liked being in front of a crowd, focus on business matters. But, when the loneliness got to be too much, Staples persuaded her to come back onstage. "Yvonne was with us on tour for about ten years," Rick Holmstrom, Staples's guitar player, said. "They had adjoining rooms. They were constantly talking and bickering. That kept Mavis from being lonely." Then it became evident that Yvonne, like Cleotha before her, was developing Alzheimer's. "When Yvonne got to the point where she had a hard time knowing where she was, or started wandering away from the microphone, it distracted Mavis onstage," Holmstrom said. "Finally, Yvonne stayed home and her friend Penny took care of her. Mavis couldn't imagine being on the road without family. I was worried about her. When Yvonne started to fade, I thought Mavis might retire." Yvonne died in 2018.

Staples no longer goes to church on Sundays. She hasn't lost her faith; she's lost the habit. She still sends her tithe to Trinity United Church of Christ, in Chicago—Jeremiah Wright's old church—but she hasn't been there for years. "I can go in my closet and pray," Staples said. "I don't have to go to church. The church is a building. I'm the church." She works out her deepest dilemmas at home, but with a little help. "The other day, I was talking about retiring, but then I thought, What would I do?" she said. "I just felt like, Why is this eighty-two-year-old woman going up onstage with these kids? I don't want to burden nobody. Speedy, my road manager, has to help me get in the van. I use a wheelchair in the airport. Some beds are too high and I have to take a running leap! I talked to the Lord. I asked him, 'Why am I still here? My whole family is gone. What do you want of me? What am I supposed to do? Have you kept me up for a reason?' And the only reason I could see is to sing my songs."

It's impossible to locate the precise birthplace of something as various as the blues, but one of its most effective incubators was a ten-thousand-acre plantation in Sunflower County, Mississippi, founded in 1895 by an eccentric white businessman named Will Dockery. At its peak, as many as four hundred Black families lived and worked on Dockery Farms. Most were sharecroppers who harvested cotton and a variety of other crops. Dockery was of Scottish descent, wore a dark suit every day, abstained from drinking and smoking, and believed in modesty and moral uplift. His plantation was a self-enclosed agrarian universe, with its own cotton gin, a sawmill, a commissary, a post office, and two churches (Methodist and Baptist). It even had its own currency. The sharecroppers lived in old boxcars and rough-hewn cabins.

The Staples family was among the Dockery farmers. Roebuck Staples (his parents had great esteem for the mail-order giant of the day, Sears, Roebuck & Co.) was the youngest of fourteen children. He was raised singing praise songs, but the blues was in the air—in juke joints and general stores, on street corners and in barrelhouses. Dockery Farms and the surrounding towns produced an astonishing crop of blues players, including Robert Johnson, Son House, McKinley Morganfield (a.k.a. Muddy Waters), and Chester Arthur Burnett (a.k.a. Howlin' Wolf). Roebuck listened to them all. But the crucial progenitor was Charley Patton, a boastful, lusty, sometimes violent man who played guitar and sang with alarming ferocity. Long before Magic Slim or Jimi Hendrix came along, Patton entertained listeners by playing his guitar between his legs and behind his back. Roebuck heard him at the Holly Ridge Store and thought, "If I ever get to be a man, I'm gonna get me a guitar and play the blues." As a teen-ager, Roebuck made ten

cents a day feeding hogs and chickens. He put those coins together to buy his first guitar, a Stella acoustic, and soon developed a fingerpicking style that drew on all he was hearing around him. The blues, he once said, "got into me, and into my sound, and into my fingers."

When Roebuck was eighteen, he married Oceola Ware, who was two years younger. In 1936, they joined the Black migration north, ending up on the South Side of Chicago. Early on, Oceola was a hotel maid. Roebuck worked as a bricklayer, in a steel mill, and in a vast and fragrant slaughterhouse that was known in town as the House of Blood.

Roebuck had moved from one musical mecca to another. Chicago was the locus of urban blues and the center of the burgeoning gospel scene. "I don't care where anybody else comes from or what anybody else does, Chicago is the capital of gospel and always will be," the singer Albertina Walker once said. Gospel music has sources in both English revival hymns and the spirituals sung in America since the arrival of Black men and women, but the godfather of Chicago's particular brand of gospel—a genre both sanctified and blues-inflected—was Thomas A. Dorsey. Born in rural Georgia in 1899, Dorsey was a prodigy, a pianist who got his education in church pews and revival tents and his early work experience in barrelhouses, brothels, and bars. After moving to Chicago, around 1919, he built a reputation playing behind Ma Rainey. But he was intent on bringing the energy of the juke joint to more hallowed ground. In Sunday services, Dorsey encouraged handclapping, foot stomping, and improvisation. He was determined to defy the conventions of the more conservative churches and provide some uplift in miserable economic times. He'd had a hit, in the nineteen-twenties, with "It's Tight Like That"; now, as the Depression settled in, he was writing songs in the mode of "If You See My Saviour." In 1932, while Dorsey was on the road, his wife, Nettie Harper, died in childbirth; their child died a day later. In the wake of that tragedy, Dorsey wrote "Take My Hand, Precious Lord," a song that became so central to the gospel canon that Mahalia Jackson sang it at Dr. King's funeral.

Dorsey helped construct the musical world in which Roebuck Staples and his family took up residence. Even while working exhausting days at the slaughterhouse, Roebuck made extra money performing at parties and churches: "I'd do the gospel on Sunday. Pick up three dollars at the joint, five dollars from the offering plate at church, and make eight dollars for the weekend and live high on the hog when my peers were happy just to get the three dollars. But I wanted to be playing only gospel even then." For a time, he sang with a group called the Trumpet Jubilees. But he grew dismayed by the group's indiscipline and decided to try something new, closer to home. One day in 1948, he gathered his children in a circle to teach them the church harmonies he had learned in Mississippi. The first song they worked on was "Will the Circle Be Unbroken," a tune taken up by country ensembles like the Carter Family. In their living room, Pops drilled his children on that song for days. "Mavis was headstrong and stubborn," he told Greg Kot, Mavis's biographer. "It took her almost two years before she could catch on to her part."

Staples acknowledges that she was a resistant pupil at first. "I didn't like to rehearse," she told me. "Pops said,



'Mavis, your voice is a gift that God gave you. If you don't use it, he'll take it back.' I was the first one in rehearsal after that."

One afternoon, Staples and I drove around the South Side, passing through her old neighborhood, "the Dirty Thirties," and beyond. She pointed out her school, the churches where she prayed and performed, the site of the Regal Theatre—the Apollo of Chicago, now long gone. But it was only when we drove past the place where she lived and sang in those first rehearsals that she really came to life. "When my aunt Katie came and heard us rehearsing one time, she said, 'Shucks, y'all sound pretty good. I believe I want y'all to come sing in my church Sunday,' " Staples recalled. "We were glad to have somewhere to sing that wasn't the living-room floor." The next Sunday, the Staples family sang at a Baptist church in the neighborhood. The shouts from the pews—the ultimate currency of approval—were startling, but they also posed a problem. "We didn't know about encores," Staples said. "We just had the one song. So we sang it three times."

Staples knew from an early age that if she was going to sing in public it could only be gospel music. Sometimes, when Pops was struggling to support the family, Mavis and Yvonne were sent to live with Oceola's mother, in Mound Bayou, Mississippi, and one day Mavis took part in a school talent show there. Without thinking much, she sang "Since I Fell for You," a jukebox hit by Ella and Buddy Johnson. When Grandma Ware found out, she was furious: "Oh, you was singing the blues, huh?" Out came the switch.

"I got the worst whipping in my life!" Staples said. "She sent me back to school with my little short dress on, my legs had pink welts. I started printing letters to my mother. I said, 'Mama, I want to come home. Grandma won't let me sing!' "

Pops was a stickler, too. Forget about the kids singing the blues: in those days, he wouldn't even let them play cards. But he was excited about the offers they were getting after that one-song première. He taught the kids to sing "Tell Heaven," "Too Close," and what became, in 1956, their first recorded hit, "Uncloudy Day." From the start, the Staple Singers were a distinctively old-fashioned group in the quartet tradition. Their haunting, down-home church harmonies reminded listeners of earlier times. "When we first went on the road, people thought we were old people because we were singing such old songs," Staples said. The one departure from tradition was



Staples once considered stepping away from singing to become a nurse. Her father said, "Don't you know you're already a nurse?"

Pops's guitar—a rarity in those days, and a "devilish" instrument to some. It was only later that many other gospel groups, like the Mighty Clouds of Joy and the Dixie Hummingbirds, hired guitar players to accompany them.

The old neighborhood was rich in musical talent. Staples developed a crush on Sam Cooke, who lived nearby, and routinely encountered the stars of the gospel world, including her role model, Mahalia Jackson. "My name is Mavis," she shyly told the singer on their first meeting. "I sing, too."

"Oh, you do?"

"Yes, Ma'am. With my father and my brother and my sisters."

"I want to hear you."

"Well, you'll hear me, because I sing *loud*."

In the early nineteen-fifties, Roebuck decided that the Staple Singers were a business. While Mavis was still in school, they would set out touring for long weekends on the "gospel highway," a circuit of Southern churches, school gymnasiums, and V.F.W. halls. They crossed paths with the Soul Stirrers, Lou Rawls and the Pilgrim Travelers, the Reverend C. L. Franklin and his daughter Aretha. Mavis got used to finishing homework assignments in boarding houses and modest hotel rooms across the Jim Crow South.

At the start of their touring days, she said, "Pops sat us down and said, 'Now listen, y'all, we're going down South. It's a different place. Everybody don't like you. And there's certain things that you'll see that's going to be different. If you want to drink water, if you see a sign that say "Colored," that's the water fountain that you drink from. And, when you go in the store, you have to be very careful.' "

Many Black touring acts carried a copy of the Green Book, an annual compendium published by Victor Hugo Green. The Green Book informed them where they could find gas, food, and lodging, and warned them which places had been designated "sundown towns"—dangerous for Black people after dark. Even so, trouble was always around the corner: random arrests, overnight stays in some dank drunk tank, white kids trying to run your car off the road. No one who'd grown up on a gospel lyric like "Were you there when they nailed Him to the tree?" failed to make the connection between a crucifixion in the ancient world and the lynchings in modern America. Staples, young as she was, knew the score. In 1955, when she was sixteen, she read about the murder of Emmett Till, in Mississippi—not far from where Pops grew up—and tried sending a message of condolence to Till's grieving mother.

When Staples finished high school, in 1957, Pops quit his job and declared it possible for the Staple Singers to focus completely on their music. Staples resisted, telling him that she wanted to study to be a nurse. "He said, 'Mavis, baby, don't you know you're already a nurse?'" she recalled. "'Don't you know that when you be singing, and those people come around

STEVE SCHAPIRO / CORBIS / GETTY

crying and want to touch your hand, you're making them feel better?'" Staples was not the rebellious sort. The Staples were now a full-time concern. "Uncloudy Day," which the group had recorded with Vee-Jay Records the previous year, was getting a lot of radio play; they were performing before bigger audiences, on longer, multistate tours. (The Staples later expanded into gospel-inflected soul and pop, on Riverside, Epic, Stax, and other labels.) They even made guest appearances on network television.

Pops did not think of his family, at first, as a political enterprise, but he'd been listening intently to Dr. King's sermons on the radio, and, while the Staple Singers were in Montgomery, Alabama, they went one Sunday to a service at Dr. King's church on Dexter Avenue. In a meeting afterward, King made it plain to Pops that the Staple Singers had a role to play in the movement. Enslaved people sang "Steal Away" on the plantations and abolitionists sang "John Brown's Body" during the Civil War, King once reminded a reporter. "For the same reasons the slaves sang, Negroes today sing freedom songs, for we, too, are in bondage." That was the case he made to Pops.

The family went back to their hotel, and Pops called his children to his room. "I like this man's message," he said. "And I think that if he can preach it, we can sing it." In the early nineteen-sixties, the Staple Singers started releasing "message songs": "I've Been Scorned," "Freedom Highway," "Long Walk to D.C.," "Respect Yourself," "When Will We Be Paid?," and Dr. King's favorite, "Why? (Am I Treated So Bad)." Although they maintained their restrained sound, their lyrics grew more insistently political: "The whole wide world is wonderin' what's wrong with the United States," they sang in "Freedom Highway." Those songs became as important to the movement as Sam Cooke's "A Change Is Gonna Come" or the Impressions' "Keep on Pushing." This was a commitment that Mavis Staples would go on upholding. She admires the current crop of rappers whose music is saturated with both politics and gospel influence—Chance the Rapper and Kendrick Lamar among them—and doesn't want to sing only the songs of the civil-rights era. Disgusted by the election of Donald Trump and the bigotry it enabled, she teamed up with her friend Jeff Tweedy on an album of assertively political new material, "If All I Was Was Black."

On those early Southern tours, stardom did not shield the Staples family from the cruelties that they were singing about. One night in November, 1964, the group wrapped up a concert in Jackson, Mississippi, packed into Pops's Cadillac, and headed north toward home. It was Mavis's turn at the wheel, and around 1 A.M. she pulled in to a gas station, in Memphis, and politely asked the attendant if he would fill the tank and clean the bug-specked windshield. She also asked for a receipt. The attendant, a tall, skinny white boy, ignored her request. As Staples told me the story: "He said, 'If you want a receipt, N-word, you come over to the office.' "

Pops, furious, told Mavis to pull the car up to the service-station office and wait. He followed the attendant into the office, where they quickly got into a shouting match.

"Let me tell you something," the white boy yelled, again using the N-word. Before the boy could continue his disquisition, Pops clocked him with a right hand. "Pops had this pinkie ring on his finger," Staples recalled, "and blood spattered." Pops, who was wearing slippers, slid on the greasy floor. Mavis saw that the attendant had grabbed a crowbar and was coming toward him. She woke Pervis, who'd been asleep, and he sprang up—"Pervis came from under those coats and out of that car like Superman!"—and hustled his father to safety. Mavis hit the gas, driving across the Mississippi into Arkansas. But soon they were pulled over by three police cars, lights flashing. The station attendant had called the police and claimed that he'd been beaten and robbed.

"They had shotguns on us, dogs were barking, big old German shepherds," Staples told me. "They had us standing on the highway with our hands up over our heads. Then they handcuffed us and one of them said, 'This boy here looks like he wants to run.' They kept calling my father 'boy.'"

In the trunk, the cops found a cigar box full of cash—more than a thousand dollars—and a gun. The cash was from their earnings on the road, and the pistol was legally registered. But the cops seemed convinced that this was evidence of a felony.

The officers shoved the Staples family into the squad cars and brought them to the local police station. "Pops walked in, hands cuffed behind his back, and this Black man is there mopping the floor," Staples recounted. "He said, 'Papa Staples, what you doing here?' And we laughed about that way later—but we couldn't laugh then." The police captain, a white man named Bobby Keen, thought he recognized Pops from television—the "Tonight Show," "Hootenanny," he couldn't remember which—and said, "My wife loves you! Is that you?"

"Yes," Pops said. "In person."

"Get them handcuffs off them people," Captain Keen told his officers. Before heading back to the interstate, Pops autographed a few of their record albums they kept in the trunk for Captain Keen.

Six weeks later, the Staple Singers were performing at the Mason Temple, in Memphis, a major stop on the gospel highway. Mavis looked over to the V.I.P. area, and there were Keen and some of his officers. Pops said, "Well, Chief, it's mighty nice of y'all to come out here to see us, but who's minding the town?"

Earlier this year, I went to see Staples and her band at the Barns, a small indoor venue on the grounds of Wolf Trap, the performing-arts center in Vienna, Virginia. The fans who lined up to show their immunization records and take their seats were almost entirely white, and of a certain vintage. That's typical of Staples's crowds these days. If I had to guess, I'd say that most people at Wolf Trap first encountered the Staple Singers in "The Last Waltz," Martin Scorsese's film of the Band's final concert, an all-star farewell held on Thanksgiving Day, 1976, at the Winterland Ballroom, in San Francisco. The Band's guests included Muddy Waters, Van Morrison, Joni Mitchell, and

Bob Dylan, and yet the Staples stole the movie, without even appearing at the concert itself. They were touring in Europe. Weeks later, Scorsese filmed them on an M-G-M soundstage playing "The Weight" together with the Band. Gospel had been an essential spice in the Band's musical stew. "We worshipped the Staple Singers, plain and simple," Levon Helm, the Band's drummer, told Greg Kot. "We tried to sing with the same kind of delivery in our harmonies. They were who we looked to." During a break in the filming, Helm tried to pass a joint to Pops, but Pops demurred. "Man, I don't want none of that mess," he said.

In the movie, Cleotha, Yvonne, and Pops are in good form, and Mavis is at her best, giving "The Weight"—a surreal, country gallop—a spiritual lift. After Helm takes the first verse, Mavis takes the second and brings the whole affair to church. Pops sings the third verse in his sweet, whispery tone, the narrative oozing out of him like a slow, thick stream of Bosco. But it's at the end, as everyone sings the verse and Mavis lags on the beat, with her signature grunts and moans and claps, that your scalp tingles and you think about the Staples, at their start, singing in their living room on the South Side.

Dylan had heard that sound at a formative age. Growing up in the Iron Range of Minnesota, he tuned in to the high-wattage radio stations from Nashville and Memphis, Shreveport and Atlanta, that blanketed the country each night with music that was far from the jukebox mainstream. "At midnight, the gospel stuff would start," Dylan later told a documentary filmmaker. "I got to be acquainted with the Swan Silvertones and the Dixie Hummingbirds, the Highway Q.C.'s and all that. But the Staple Singers came on . . . and they were so different." What shook him was the shivery sound of "Sit Down Servant," a spooky, almost medieval-seeming song that Pops and his children had recorded in 1953. "Mavis was singing stuff like 'Yonder come little David with a rock and sling, I don't want to meet him, he's a dangerous man.' . . . I thought, 'Oh, my goodness!' That made my hair stand up. I thought, 'That's how the world is.'"

You can see black-and-white video of Staples singing that song in the early sixties. Pops is dressed in a dark suit, the kids in dark choir gowns. Mavis, a startlingly beautiful young woman, stands in the foreground. Her hands are lifted, her expression glowing, and then comes that heavy voice, a great rumbling from her deepest self: "I don't want to meet him. . . . He's a daaayn-*jus* man!" And, from a hushed chant, the singing picks up volume and pace, propelled by that warbly guitar, the slinky licks up the fretboard, a cross-play of handclapping on the beat and after the beat, until Mavis achieves a kind of scary, wheels-off propulsion:

> God spoke to Joshua to do thy will
> He said if you fight the battle, the sun'll stand still
> He give me a lantern and he told me to go
> He give me a harp and he told me to blow

Something otherworldly is going on; the voices grow as swift and strange as some kind of celestial railroad. If you were a kid listening to that song in the dark, on the Iron Range or anywhere else, you, too, might hide under the covers until daybreak.

Dylan arrived in New York in January, 1961, when he was nineteen. As he was building a reputation on the folk scene in Greenwich Village, he ran into the Staple Singers at a music festival in the city, and an acquaintance introduced them. "Bob said, 'I know the Staple Singers!'" Staples recalled. "He said, 'Pops, he has a velvety voice, but Mavis gets *rough* sometimes.' And then he quoted that verse in 'Sit Down Servant.'"

"I didn't know no white boy knew our stuff!" Pops said.

As the sixties wore on, the Staple Singers broadened their repertoire. Pops, who was in equal measure idealistic and shrewd, saw a growing appetite, among white listeners as well as Black, for his message songs. He even had the group record some of Dylan's songs, including "Masters of War" and "A Hard Rain's A-Gonna Fall." Dylan developed what Staples calls a case of "puppy love." On a cafeteria line before a performance, Dylan turned to Pops and said, "Pops, I want to marry Mavis."

"Well, don't you tell me, tell Mavis," Pops said.

Staples delights in talking about it: "He was a cute little boy, little blue eyes, curly hair. He and Pervis got to be tight. They'd sit out on the stoop, drink wine."

She describes their relationship as "courting," with some "smooching" here and there. But, when I asked if they almost got married, she smiled and said, "Nobody *almost* gets married.

"I still have letters that we would write to each other. And the only time we would see each other was when we happened to be on the same show." She went on, "I was the one that dodged a bullet. I wouldn't have been able to keep up with him." But, she added, "if I stayed with him in his life, I don't think he would have turned to drugs like he did."

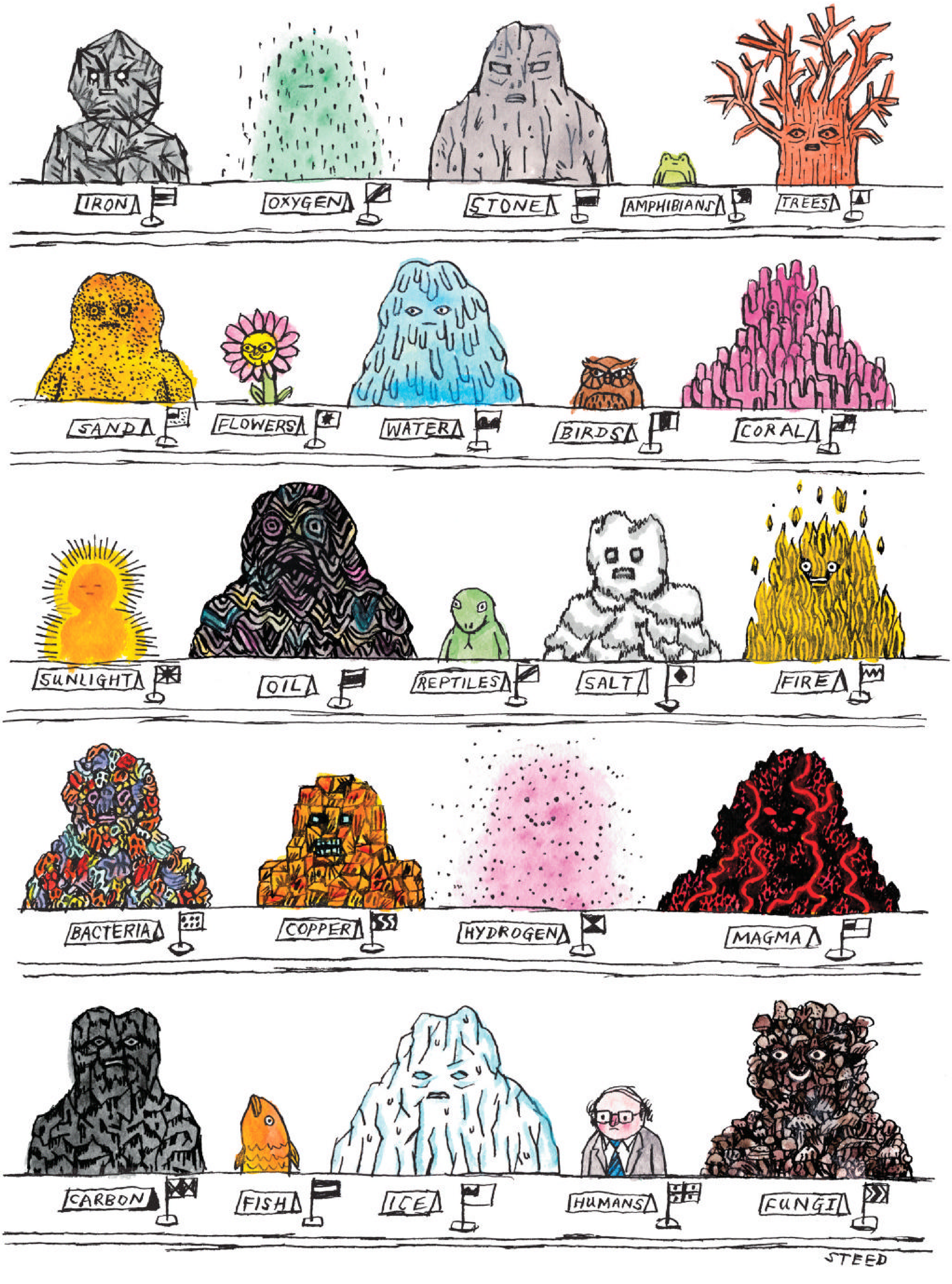
Many years later, in 2016, Staples and her band toured as an opening act for Dylan. As a matter of self-preservation, Dylan makes a habit of keeping to himself on the road, rarely consorting with the opening act when he's got one. This time was different.

"The first show, someone knocked on my door and said someone wants to see you," she told me. "In comes Bobby. And I said, 'Bobby, I'm so glad to see you. I been wanting to see you for so long.'"

"You should have married me," Dylan said. "You would've seen me every day."

Staples did marry once, and miserably. In 1964, she met a Chicago mortician named Spencer Leak. The Leak family was prominent on the South Side, and their wedding was a major social event. But Leak wasn't happy about his wife's stardom, and it didn't help that they could not have children, a grave disappointment to Staples. The end came six years later, with Staples changing the locks on her door and Leak sleeping in the funeral parlor. Her next album, a solo effort, was called "Only for the Lonely." Years later, she told Prince about her marriage, inspiring him to write a song for her called "The Undertaker."

Staples is a canny retailer of her


IRON
OXYGEN
STONE
AMPHIBIANS
TREES
SAND
FLOWERS
WATER
BIRDS
CORAL
SUNLIGHT
OIL
REPTILES
SALT
FIRE
BACTERIA
COPPER
HYDROGEN
MAGMA
CARBON
FISH
ICE
HUMANS
FUNGI
STEED

own story. She's not going to get into a funk over lost loves and ancient disappointments—not now, not in front of you or me. Instead, she'll tell you about when the Staple Singers went to Ghana, and a bureaucrat showed up at her hotel door with a note from a Ghanaian chief. "Chief Nana wanted me to be Wife No. 4," she said. "We had all gone to his palace one night. All this marble!" The chief, she said, was "good-looking, but not good-looking enough for me to say, 'Oh, yes, I'll be Wife No. 4.' I mean, what's Wife Nos. 2 and 3 gonna do? Probably tear me apart."

That ability to deflect, to find humor in complicated experience, indicates not a lack of depth but a self-knowing soul. "I'm always struck by how Mavis, no matter what she sings, no matter what the decade is, is always leading you back to the sound of the church," Braxton Shelley, a scholar of music and the Black church at Yale, told me. "At the same time, Mavis always *seems* like Mavis. She tells that terrible story about the gas station and getting arrested, and she is talking about white supremacy, about painful things. But, at the same time, you always sense that she has woven whatever emotional pain she's experienced into the fabric of her life. I don't pretend to deep knowledge of her inner life, but there is a deep sense of *pleasantness* about Mavis Staples, which is a kind of miracle, you know?"

Because Staples is not eager to tell unhappy stories or engage in trash talk, you're taken aback in the rare moment when she heads into scratchy territory—as when she discusses her relationship with Aretha Franklin. Staples knew the Franklin family for much of her life. When she was a teen-ager, Aretha's father, C. L. Franklin, one of the country's leading Black preachers, came to Chicago from Detroit to deliver his famous sermon "The Eagle Stirreth Her Nest." "I ran all around and around the church," Staples told me. "The Holy Spirit had me." It was, she said, like a "fire hitting you from the bottom of your feet."

She became good friends with Aretha Franklin and her siblings. There's no question that Franklin had a more powerful and versatile vocal instrument, and Staples, despite her ability to put over a song with an uncommon depth of feeling, has never pretended otherwise. But she always felt somewhat diminished by Franklin, and, after they teamed up to record a live church performance of Edwin Hawkins's "Oh Happy Day," in 1987, she felt outright disrespected. When the recording was released, it became clear that Franklin had turned down the volume on Staples's vocal track. Staples said she just shrugged and let it go. "I should've told her, 'No, just don't put the record out,' " she said. "But you know me: goody-goody Mavis."

Franklin, she admits, put her temperament to the test. "I put up with her for a long time till I got tired, you know?" Staples told me. "She was very insecure. I tried my best to be her friend. She would call me and ask me to call her back. When I called her back, the number was changed. So, you know, she was weird like that."

Still, Staples said, "I'm just a happy-go-lucky, you know? I can get over anything." Except deaths in the family. Through the years, Pops and Mavis were the constants in the Staple Singers. Yvonne, Pervis, and Cleotha moved in and out of the group; Oceola stayed home. The one sibling who never performed was Cynthia, the youngest. Cynthia suffered from depression. Kids had bullied her in



school and pestered her, asking why she wasn't singing with her famous family. Sometimes, when Mavis was in Chicago, she let Cynthia come stay with her and tried to cheer her up. "I pushed Pops to have Cynthia play tambourine or something for us," Staples said, but that never worked out.

One day in 1973, when Cynthia was twenty-one, she was at home with Oceola, who was in the kitchen making supper. The rest of the family was on the road, performing in Las Vegas. Cynthia mentioned to Oceola that she'd received a check in the mail from Pops and wanted to write a thank-you note. Instead, she went into the living room and shot herself with a .38-calibre revolver. "We just never knew how bad she was suffering," Staples said.

Backstage at Wolf Trap, Staples and her band prepared for the show as they often do, by singing a gospel tune, "Wonderful Savior." Sometimes, particularly in the South, Staples might get a crowd that is racially mixed, but not often. It's been a long time since she could measure her performance by the number of shouts and "amen"s from an audience; no one at Wolf Trap was likely to require a deacon to fan them back into consciousness. Those gospel theatrics and emotions belong to a different world. And modern gospel—whether it is Kirk Franklin's hip-hop-inflected music or the vast number of choirs in churches across the country or Kanye West's Sunday Service Choir—is not a presence for most of these listeners. All the same, Staples will sometimes have her guitar player, Rick Holmstrom, sneak a look at the audience. "I can sense a difference in her when we get an amen corner with even some pockets of African Americans—it changes the vibe," he told me. "I'll peek, and she'll say, 'How does it look? Slim and his brother None?' I'll say, 'I don't think it's a "Weight" night.' That means there's some Black folks. We can lean on soul and gospel. A 'Weight' night would be when it's a white crowd."

The Staple Singers, like their leading Black brethren in the blues, have always had a reverent audience of white musicians. One of the first singles the Rolling Stones recorded was "The Last Time," a hit in 1965, which is credited to Mick Jagger and Keith Richards but was inspired by a Staples recording from a decade before. Pops Staples didn't mind; the tune is from a traditional gospel song. Then the Stones' management asked the Staple Singers to open for them on their 1972 tour. By now, Pops had shifted the group into more popular material. Singles like "I'll Take You There" might have displeased some

gospel purists, but they widened the group's appeal and made them wealthy. No matter. The Stones offered the Staple Singers a paltry five hundred dollars a night. Pops turned them down. "I'd like to think Mick Jagger doesn't know about this," he told a reporter for *Variety*.

Mavis Staples has no patience for segregation, in politics or in music. She is at once sure-minded about the essential place of Black composers and performers in American music and open to singing with anyone who can keep up. Over and over in recent years, she has been a presence in that gumbo genre known as Americana. Among her albums in that vein is a sentimental one called "You Are Not Alone," recordings that she did in 2011 with Levon Helm, at his barn in Woodstock. Helm, who died in 2012, was suffering from throat cancer; he was terribly thin, his voice raspy and weak, and yet together they rise to the occasion, collaborating on Curtis Mayfield's protest anthem "This Is My Country," Dylan's gospel song "Gotta Serve Somebody," "The Weight," and, yes, "This May Be the Last Time."



"Here's my bar code—let's keep in touch."

Onstage at Wolf Trap, Staples was energetic. She put together a set that mixed Staple Singers hits ("If You're Ready," "I'll Take You There"), a Delta blues (Mississippi Fred McDowell's "You Got to Move"), and covers of songs by Talking Heads, Buffalo Springfield, and Funkadelic. She also did a ribald version of "Let's Do It Again," a song that Curtis Mayfield had to talk Pops into performing. "I'm a church man, I'm not singing that," Pops had protested. "Oh, Pops, the Lord won't mind," Mayfield said. "It's just a love song." Commerce prevailed. Besides, how many hours are there, really, between Saturday night and Sunday morning? As if to deepen the sin, Staples got into a kind of squatting, hip-bumping thing with Holmstrom, and, at one point, he even used the head of his guitar to lift her skirt. Afterward, she scolded him, laughing, "Rick, you took that sin song too serious! You can't be doing that!"

For the most part, the band stands back and lets Staples sing, giving her the space to move within the song and have her way with it. Holmstrom said, "Pops would tell her, 'Sing it plain. Put it out there.' She was once screaming a little, getting a little too much, and Pops said, 'Just stand there and sing it nice and plain and you'll get your point across.'" These days, she finishes her set with "I'll Take You There." She has performed that song as often as Dylan has performed "Like a Rolling Stone," but she does it with such lightness and conviction that, as the audience sings along, you get the sense that she wouldn't mind singing all the night through. At the end, Holmstrom touches her gently on the elbow and leads her into the wings.

When we talked later, Staples returned, as always, to the weight that bears down on her: the loneliness she feels when she is not singing, all the missing—Oceola, Cynthia, Pervis, Cleotha, Pops, Yvonne. I asked her if she thinks about the end.

"You know, I do," she said. "I do quite often. And I wonder how I'm going to go. Where will I be? I've prepared everything. I have a will—because I have a lot of nieces and nephews, Pervis's children, and charities. But I seem to think about that more now than ever. And I tell myself, 'I gotta stop thinking.' Speedy, he tells me maybe I should talk to a therapist. I said, 'Don't need no therapist. The Lord is my therapist. That's who I talk to when I need help.' "

I asked her if she gets an answer.

"Yes, indeed. That's why I'm still here. He lets me know when I'm right and when I'm wrong, but he ain't letting me know about when my time is coming. But, see, I just have to be ready. If it comes tomorrow, I'm ready. I have done all that I'm supposed to do. I've been good. I've kept my father's legacy alive. Pops started this, and I'm not just going to squander it. I'm going to sing every time I get on the stage—I'm gonna sing with all my heart and all I can put out." ♦



 ILLUSTRATION BY LISA MOUCHET

He woke to an angry house and darkness in the windows. Aunt Maisie had packed his suitcase the night before and left it near the front door, and so he dressed himself without turning on the light and came out and dropped the pajamas on top of the suitcase. She was in the kitchen, banging the pans around.

Buddy, she said when she saw him, set yourself down and get some of this food in you. Her eyes were funny, all red and puffy, and he didn't like to see them like that. When he sat down, she came up behind him and hugged his head so hard it hurt, and her hands smelled like soap and cigarettes and grease, and he pulled away.

He ate her eggs, which were like his mother's eggs, though her biscuit was not like his mother's biscuit; it was too dry, and there was no tomato jam. When he was finished, she took his plate and fork and washed them.

I can't stand it, she said. I will never forgive that girl, not as long as I live.

All right, he said softly.

I can't stay around to watch this, she said. You get your shoes and coat on. I'm going in to work early so's I don't have to look that selfish, wicked girl in the face. She gathered her own things and swiped a thin red line of lipstick on her mouth, then took her car keys from the hook and went out the front door. There she bent to put his pajamas in his suitcase, and said impatiently, You come on outside, Buddy. That rocking chair's comfortable enough for you to wait in, I wager. I'll get you a jelly jar of water. You need to relieve yourself, get down off the porch and do it in the azaleas.

Now he was outside in the darkness, and the smell of the orange blossoms was all around. The light above Aunt Maisie's front door was thick with termites that were flying in and out of the beam.

Aunt Maisie came out again with water for Buddy and locked her front door, and, for a second, as she leaned toward the lock, in the dim light her hair was the same as his mother's hair, and he forgot, and thought she was his mother, and he nearly cried out in gladness. Then she looked up at him and it was with Aunt Maisie's face. The gladness died in him and he began to cry.

Now don't you start blubbering, Aunt Maisie said. You'll set me off again. Big like a man and twenty years old, but you're just a little old baby in your head, poor soul.

No, ma'am. I'm a man, he said, and wiped his face.

Because he was much taller than her, she waited until he sat in the rocking chair, then she leaned in and kissed him on the cheek. You be good, Buddy, she said. Get down on your knees and pray every night like your mama taught you. Don't you be making no trouble, you hear?

Yes, ma'am, he said.

I'll write you every week on Sunday and try to get myself up there to visit once a month or so, depending on my money. You know I don't make barely enough for my own food and, besides, I'm getting old now, not doing so good myself these days. Well, no more of that. In any event, don't forget there's a soul in the world that loves you. That's right, your Aunt Maisie loves you, she said.

Yes, ma'am, he said.

She dug in her pocketbook and put a little note under the handle of his suitcase. Now you be sure your sister sees that note whenever she turns up, you hear? She smiled, but it wasn't a smile, really.

Yes, ma'am, he said, and began moving in the rocking chair as she went down the steps and into her car, and the headlights were too bright for a minute, until she backed all the way out into the road and was gone.

He did not feel the cold so much when he rocked. He was soothed by the orange blossoms hiding out there in the darkness, the golden rain of termites, the noises of some night bird calling somewhere, the good rhythm of his rocking. It was nice to see the way the sky began to take on a pale line at its edge, then pink began to grow out of the pale line and spun up and out, and he could see the orange groves out there coming clear in the new light. Then the sun rose full, and though he knew enough not to look at it for very long, he did look at it a little bit, and when he closed his eyes the sun shone in echoing red on his lids. Now the fog was lifting up from the ground under the trees and an animal he didn't know the name of, shiny and hard-looking with a long tail, moved slowly through the yard, sniffing at things.

Then, all at once, there was Joanie in the morning light in front of him, her own suitcase in her hand and a little straw hat with a yellow band on her head. She had walked up without him seeing or hearing her. She was frowning a little. Hey there, Bud, she said. Aunt Maisie isn't here with you? She left you out here all by your lonesome? She jutted her chin at the house, and he turned to look but there was no one there. Then she saw the note under the suitcase's handle and pulled it out and read it and gave a sharp little laugh. She balled the note up and threw it down on the worn rubber doormat.

She feels so dang strong about it, maybe she could've kept you herself, Joanie said. That old bat-faced shrew. She took a white handkerchief out of her pocketbook and spat on a corner, then rubbed at his face where he still wore Aunt Maisie's kiss. You ready to walk a bit? she said.

Yes, Joanie, he said, and stood and chuckled as the rocking chair rocked on without him in it.

She took his suitcase in one hand and hers in the other and led him down the path to the soft, thick dirt of the road. They went for a long time through the stretch with laurel oak trees and palmettos on one side, the big plantation of orange trees on the other. It was early enough that there was some shade, and they kept to it. Joanie seemed to be thinking about something and didn't talk, which was all right, because he liked to watch her two braids snake back and forth across her back as she walked.

When they got to the turnoff toward the fishing camp, she put the suitcases down with a sigh and shook out her hands. At this rate, she said, we're not going to make the noon bus. Then she looked at him where he stood and said, Hey, wait, what am I thinking? You're pretty strong, right, Buddy?

Real strong, he said, and he picked up the suitcases as if they were nothing.

They went on through the sun spots and the shade and were almost at the crossroads when a sound came from behind them, and a pickup barrelled past in a big blow of dust. Then the truck stopped and blinked its back lights and reversed toward them. Joanie swore

under her breath and patted her hair but was smiling when the driver rolled down his window. He was a red-faced man with eyes hidden under the brim of his cap. Well, if it isn't Joanie Greene, the driver said.

In the flesh, she said. And her big old brother, Buddy. How you doing, Mr. Summerlin? You're not going into town, are you? I like your new truck.

Looks like I am now, he said. I was only driving around in my brand-new baby, just now picked her up from the lot. She's a '56, last year's model, so I got her for a song. Anyways, since you've graduated you know you can call me Harmon.

Thanks, Harmon, she said. Saving us a long, hot walk.

Toss them suitcases in the back and climb up right next to me, girl, he said. You and your brother. How's it going, Buddy? I heard a bunch of rumors about you, but your mama kept you to her own self, didn't she.

Yessir, Buddy said, and put the suitcases into the bed of the truck.

Speaking of which, the driver said as they climbed in and Joanie reached across Buddy's lap to close the door, I'm sorry for your loss, both of you.

Thank you, Joanie said. We didn't get along so great all the time, but it's still not easy to lose a mother.

The truck started moving, and the wind felt so good on Buddy's cheeks that he closed his eyes. Joanie told the driver how their mother had barely left them anything. The bank had come in and taken away the house, and Joanie had to scramble to sell off everything before it was put out on the street. Humiliating, she said. All my mama's old-lady friends haggling with me over little pieces of her embroidery, her clock, her teapot. Like vultures. Trying to get as much out of me for as little money as possible.

Girl, the driver said, you know that if you need help all you got to do is ask. We can work something out. And he looked at Buddy out of the corner of his eye and slowly put one of his big red hands on Joanie's knee.

Joanie laughed and didn't pull her knee away. You're a good guy, Harmon, she said. But you see we got our suitcases. We're getting out of this old dump.

Where to? he said.

She said, Guess.

Huh, he said, and looked across at Buddy. Something new came into his face, and he said, You taking him to the Colony up in Gainesville. That place for the feebleminded and epileptic. Well, well. Isn't that something. Everybody always said how your mama should have done it years ago.

I am, yeah, she said. I wrote away and got a letter back that they're holding a place for him. They started calling it something else, though. Sunland. Sounds softer.

And you staying up there? Harmon said. Getting yourself a job, becoming a real career girl?

Nah, Joanie said, and a little smile played on her lips and she said, Surely you remember how smart I am.

Top of your class, he said. A whipcracker. Run rings around the rednecks in this place.

Anyways. Last year I applied to all the ladies' colleges up North and I got my pick. Took the one that gave me a full scholarship, up there in Maine. Then my mama got sick and they let me defer and come for the spring semester. Got me a train ticket and a hundred-dollar bill and just a little more to get me there and set up with books before school starts in about a week.

Jesus. Maine, he said. Practically the North Pole. You're going to freeze your little Florida fanny off, girl.

That's the idea, she said. Give me igloos and whale blubber. I'd go to another planet if I could.

Well, congratulations, Harmon said, and his hand slid a little farther up her thigh and some of his fingers disappeared under her skirt. You know, I heard about you, Joanie Greene. I know some people around here will be missing you sorely.

She pushed his hand back down to her knee and said, Ah, Harmon, come on, now.

They were nearing the barn at the edge of town that had a life-size plaster bull on its roof, and Buddy leaned forward eagerly and put his finger on the windshield and shouted out, Bull!

The other two laughed, and Joanie said, Yep, Buddy, that's a bull. She took Buddy's big hand in her small one and squeezed it.

Hey, listen, the driver said too quickly as they came close to the bus station. You got some time before the bus leaves, maybe we can drop Buddy off to sit for a spell on a bench there and you and me can drive somewheres for a little chat. Give you a goodbye to remember. Make you think of your old home town in a positive light when you're up there in Maine.

Joanie didn't lose her smile, but it went tight and she said, Nah, thanks for the offer, but we don't have all that much time.

The truck stopped and she leaned over Buddy and opened the door and pushed him out. Grab them suitcases, Bud, she said in a low voice, and then she went around to the driver's window and murmured there for a bit. Buddy watched from the shade as the pleasantness fell off the driver's face and he began to look red and then angry, and then he pulled out his wallet and handed over some bills to Joanie, who tucked them into her pocketbook. The driver threw the pickup into reverse and drove away far too fast, spitting dust up all over them again.

Never coming back to this old snake pit again, she said, might as well make a little money setting fire to all my bridges. Still can't believe they let that old lecher work at the high school.

She sighed and smacked dust off her skirt and blouse and hat, and said, Anyways, we got about a half hour, what do you say we go get ourselves a milkshake, and led Buddy into the drugstore where their mother used to take him for lunch after church on Sundays.

There was nobody in the drugstore besides the boy in the paper cap behind the counter, who flushed when he saw Joanie come in. Hey there, Buddy! he called out in a strange, strained voice. You here for your usual? Burger, chocolate malted?

Oh, yes, please, Buddy said, putting down the suitcases and sitting on a stool. His stomach rumbled loudly.

Hey there, Joanie, the boy said, flicking his eyes at her. Haven't seen you for a spell. You doing good? You looking good.

Well, I'm an orphan now. So not so good, I guess, she said dryly.

Ah, jeez. Oh, boy, the boy said, and his blush became almost purple. I'm so sorry, Joanie. I didn't know. Was wondering why your mama didn't bring

THE BREAD, THE BUTTER, THE ORANGE MARMALADE

Nothing was what I wanted. The bread, white
chalk. The butter, rancidity. The marmalade,
bitterness. The nail on my right hand, the ragged
ending to a difficult day. He'd said, Oh, really,

you're wearing that? I was, I said. But now
there was no room for me in the room.
The lights were too bright. Always a problem
when windows faced the sun. Especially

when the sky showed its face for too long.
No rain for days, then, suddenly, rain. I'd worn
the red shoes and now they would be ruined.
How to care less. That phrase, "I couldn't

care less," as if zero were already a viewpoint.
There were two doors into the house: the front
door, which was rarely used, and the side door,
which was accessed by entering the screened

porch where my stepfather's wood was stacked
against the wall. A tall bin of nails anchored
the corner. What was he building now?
The baby was heavy in my arms. If I put him

down, he'd undoubtedly wake. I could tell, time
was a migraine heading straight for my right eye.
The waking baby's cry would be an expert knife
through injured flesh. It was that kind of a season.

—*Mary Jo Bang*

Buddy in here this last month or so. Ah, man, I'm such a pumpkin head. Listen, I'll make it up to you. I'll buy you lunch. It's on me. Well, it's on Mr. Katz who owns the place, but he'll never know. And the boy winked and turned away and began fiddling with the grill, shaking his head once in a while and hissing under his breath at his own stupidity.

Joanie smiled to herself then, but every time the boy stole a glance at her she put a sad expression on her face.

Buddy looked at himself in the mirror behind the syrups. He liked his dark hair and dark eyes, but he did not like the dust that was in his hair. It kept being a surprise to him that it was Joanie next to him in the mirror, carefully shaking the dirt out of her clothing and her hair and dabbing at her face with a paper napkin, and not his mother. Every time, the surprise turned to pain.

The boy in the paper hat delivered two malteds, two burgers, and two fries, and hovered as they ate. Buddy was so hungry he barely chewed, and Joanie ate delicately, touching the corners of her mouth with her napkin after every bite. When Buddy was done, he looked at her food so hard that she pushed it over to him.

Wasn't good? the boy said anxiously. You didn't like it, Joanie?

Don't you fret, Joanie said, it was wonderful. I just haven't been eating much recently and it takes only a few bites to fill me up.

Nice to hear you thought it was good, the boy said, but then the bells above the door jingled and an old couple, arm in arm, came in and sat down on the stools. He rolled his eyes and went over with his little pad of paper to take their order.

Buddy finished all the food. Joanie wiped his face and hands. She slid off the stool and dug into her pocketbook for a quarter. Then she reconsidered, replaced the quarter, and put a dime on the counter.

Let's go, she said to Buddy.

But they hadn't gone more than a few steps before the boy rushed back to where they'd sat and said, Hey, Joanie, hey, Joanie, wait a second, do you maybe want to go out with me one of these days? I can borrow my brother's car. We'll go for a drive, maybe get some dinner, maybe. Or go bowling or fishing or something.

Joanie turned around with a broad smile on her face and said, Oh, I'd love that, truly. Why don't you just call my Aunt Maisie's house for a date? She don't like me going out with boys, so she'll try to tell you I don't live there, but don't you listen, just keep calling and one day you'll get me, not her.

Oh, great, Joanie, the boy said, I'll do that. I'll just keep calling for you.

You do that, she said, and she and Buddy went outside and Joanie laughed as they crossed the road. Oh, boy, she said. Maisie's going to get so mad.

Yes, Buddy said, and laughed, not because he understood but because his sister was laughing and the sound made him happy.

But soon he saw that something was wrong, and he stopped and put down the suitcase. Home is this way, he said slowly, pointing down the street full of dusty magnolias. Church this way, he said, pointing at the big red brick church on the corner.

Joanie shaded her eyes and looked at him and said gently, We're not going to church or home, Bud. We're off on a bus to Gainesville.

Oh, he said. I don't know that place.

Me neither, she said. Well, we lived up there when we was real little, but when Daddy left Mama so sudden she took a strong dislike to the place, brought us down to this dumb little nothing town.

I want Mama, Buddy said, and began to cry.

Ah, none of that, Buddy, she said, none of that right now. Big old boy blubbering in the street. As if it's not hard enough as it is. And she put the suitcase back in his hand, and took his other hand and pulled him through the

parking lot to where the bus was already grumbling and people were slowly climbing up into it.

The bus was broiling hot and they had to go halfway back to find a seat, but Joanie said it'd be cool once they were moving and wind came through the windows. She parked their suitcases on their laps, because, she said in a whisper, you can't trust none of the people who ride buses. All the people you can trust already have their own cars and wouldn't be caught dead in a bus. Someday, she said dreamily, she was going to buy herself a great big car, pearly colored, with leather so soft inside you'd think you were riding along in a cool white bed.

But Buddy wasn't listening, because among the people getting on the bus was a woman with a great puff of red hair under a very tiny hat, and in one hand she held a blue suitcase and in the other a golden cage with two crested cockatiels in it. She was heavy, and gasping, and she stopped for a minute at the seat opposite Buddy and Joanie's, then scanned her options and sighed, and put the cage next to the window and settled herself down.

The driver came on and took people's quarters. Joanie cursed under her breath but opened her little pocketbook and dug around for change. Bleeding me dry, she said to Buddy. Guess I won't be eating until I get to Maine.

The lady across the way overheard her, and said, Maine? You two running off to Maine? I come up on this bus and I see you here and I think, Look at that handsome boy, that pretty girl, I bet they're sweethearts running off together, how romantic. And I says to myself, Ada Severin, you sit yourself down right next to them there, see if you can't get their story, maybe you know their people, but then the closer up to you I get, the more I see that no, they're not sweethearts, not at all, maybe they're brother and sister, there's a family resemblance around the eyes, and then by the time I get here I see clear that there's something funny going on with that handsome boy right there, maybe something not quite right up in his brain.

Don't you say that. Everything's just perfect in his brain, Joanie said sharply. He's all angels and rainbows up there. His gears are just a little slower than most.

In any event, the lady said with a chesty sort of laugh, not often that I'm wrong. Blessed Jesus has bestowed upon me the power of perception. I always had it, I guess you'd say, but it got sharpened when I started reading them Sherlock Holmes books in the library. What you do is you look real hard at a person and see all the little things and then put them together. Like, the bus driver has those deep scars on his hands, you see them? I bet he was a turpentine cutter up in the pines for a long while. But he has a little hitch in his walk, and I bet an accident happened and that's why he started driving buses.

Maybe so, Joanie said. Maybe not.

Say, the lady said in an excited voice, he's coming back this way. Let's see if I'm right. She said to the bus driver, Pardon me, but we got a little wager going that you used to be a turpentine cutter up in them pines once upon a time.

The driver stopped in the aisle and looked down at the lady's face for a long moment. At last he said, gravely, I don't believe I know you, ma'am, and kept going to his seat at the front.

See? The lady crowed. Told you.

Neither confirmation nor denial, Joanie said. I think he gave you the old mind your own beeswax.

Dear, no. I saw the confirmation plain as day there in his face, the lady said. In any event, smells like someone around here's been eating onions recently. The Lord has blessed me with a powerful nose, can smell near on anything, and there's nothing worse than riding four hours on a bus with someone who's been eating onions. She opened her very tiny purse and took out a tin, pulled the top off, delicately lifted away the paper with the tip of her finger to reveal pale little lozenges inside. Violet candy? she offered.

And, since Joanie and Buddy had both eaten onions on their burgers, they took one candy apiece.

Tastes like licking a plaster wall, Joanie said, making a face.

You're welcome, the lady said. Took me a minute, but my perceptions about you sure did come clear at last, the lady said.

Oh, yeah? Joanie said.

Yes, I can see you're dumping your brother at that Farm Colony up in Gainesville, and going on alone to Maine, 'cause you got you a job there. The lady squinted, looking at Joanie's shoes, her hands, her hair, her straw hat, and said, I don't know. Shopkeeper. No, no, I got it. Lady's companion.

Something struggled in Joanie, but at last she said with a smile she tried to bite down, Almost. Women's college.

College girl. Well, I'll be, the lady said. I myself begged and begged to go to college, but my daddy said no, not even a Christian college, not even a Home Economics course. Ada, honey, no amount of book reading can make a woman a better housekeeper, he always said to me. But of course that was a different time, before the first Great War, before women even got to vote and then got all uppity and started yelling for things. Well, to



". . . and white, not yellow. Block, not shredded. Aged, but not too aged that it doesn't slice well."

tell you the truth, I'm mighty envious of you going off to college. I would have loved to learn about the old books and philosophers and such. Though I say, I always do say, a woman's place is in the home. She said this with such vehemence, her chins wobbled.

One of the birds in the cage was sleeping, and the other was puffed up and preening under its wings. It stopped when it saw Buddy staring at it and shouted out, Red Peril!

The lady laughed. Oh, it just tickles me no end when he says that, she said. I taught him that myself. It's what all the boys used to call me back in the day, not because I'm one of them Communists, of course not, but because of my hair. She fluffed her hair with one plump hand and said, Red Peril. I know you can't see it, but I used to be pretty as you, my girl.

I believe it if you say it, Joanie said. The bus had started moving through the long yellow afternoon, and the air blowing through the windows came as a great relief.

In any event, the lady said, college girl, let's see if you got the power of perception like me. Bet you can't take a look at me and tell my story the way I did with the bus driver and you.

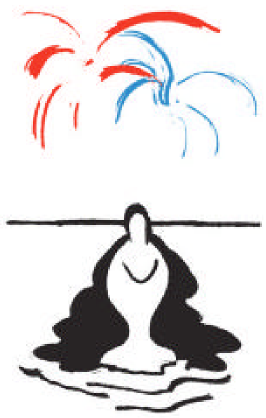
All right, Joanie said, and she put on a very serious face and looked the woman over slowly and so hard that her eyes began to cross. At last, in a spooky voice, she said, You teach piano up in Gainesville. You come down here for a week every year to visit your sister but couldn't leave your birds behind because you're a spinster, and you live all alone in your little apartment up there. You and your sister don't get along at all, because of the bad blood between you. Your sister is still mad, deep down, that your daddy left the house up in town to you when he died and all she got was a bunch of fields full of nothing down in these parts. You spent the whole week playing solitaire in different rooms and quarrelling over what you wanted to eat for supper.

The lady gaped at Joanie, her little eyes blinking fast. At last she said, Bless me. I'm a widow, not a spinster, but besides that, you're dead on. You're a natural, just like me.

Joanie laughed and said, Nah. My mama used to clean the house for your sister's neighbor, old Mr. Hubbard. Your sister would complain about your visits for weeks before you came down.

Oh, what a dirty trick! the lady cried out, her cheeks turning red. How un-Christian of you. But I don't know what I should have expected from a girl who is throwing away her own brother like he's trash.

And then she turned her face indignantly toward the front of the bus and bellowed for all to hear, A friend loveth at all times, and a brother is born for adversity. Proverbs.



I'm seventeen, lady, Joanie said angrily. How the heck can I take care of a big old jug of molasses like him? Anyways, I was just having a little fun, Joanie said in a sweeter voice, but the lady had set her angry face toward her birds and her own window, where Florida was rushing by.

Joanie lowered her face to Buddy's shoulder and tried to muffle her laughter. Soon, though, she just rested her head there, and her eyes slowly closed and she fell asleep.

After some time, the lady with the birds extracted a peeled hard-boiled egg from her bag, opened a sheet of paper carefully, and dipped every bit of the white of the egg into the salt and pepper there. Buddy liked the way the lady ate the egg, in tiny fast bites, leaving the golden center for the end, which she rolled in the last of the salt and pepper and let sit in her mouth until it dissolved. Then she, too, fell asleep and her snores, high in her nose, rose up and down in the air of the bus.

Buddy liked everything about the bus right now: the feel of his sister's head on his shoulder and the smell of her hair; the way that the bumps in the road made the flesh of the woman with the birds jiggle; the way that the birds swayed inside the cage on their strange sharp feet and bobbed their pretty crests and let their eyes go to slits. Through the window, when he let his eyes unfocus, the desperate scrabbling cypresses with their feet in the water became a blur of gray and shining brown, and the palmettos spun a green weave. They stopped at each little town along the way, but when the bus picked up speed again everything flashed gold and green and brown and blue, over and over, and the sun began to lower itself and upon his hands the hot yellow sunlight of late afternoon began to spread.

It was then that something caught Buddy's attention. Rather, it was the lack of something, for the bird lady's high snoring had stopped and a strange silence had overtaken the bus. He turned his head to look at the bird lady. She was wearing a serious face and leaning into the aisle. Now he saw that she was leaning over his sister's pocketbook, which, though the strap was still slung across her shoulder, had fallen off her lap and into the aisle. He saw the lady put her hand inside the pocketbook. Slowly, she pulled the roll of cash from it and held it in her hand, smiling. But then she looked up and saw Buddy watching her. Her face flushed and she blinked her eyes fast and licked her lips, then she peeled a bill away from the roll and shoved the rest back into the pocketbook, and closed the clasp with nimble fingers.

Just having a little joke, she whispered. Just some fun, no harm, she said, and tucked the bill she had taken down the neck of her blouse. She put a finger to her lips and went, Shush.

Joanie, Buddy said, shaking his sister.

Hush now, don't wake her, the lady said. Poor girl looks awful tired, she needs a rest. She took the paper bag of food that was squeezed between herself and the birdcage and tried to hand it to him. I got some nice ham sandwiches in there for you, she said, coaxingly. I don't even like ham, but my sister made me take them. There's some pecan sandies there, too. You like cookies? Everyone likes cookies.

Joanie, he said, but was distracted by the smell of the ham from the bag that the lady had dropped on his lap.

Anyways, the lady said, she won't miss it in the long run. Pretty girl like her can always find a way to make a little money. She smiled, and there was lipstick all over her large front teeth.

Hey, Joanie, Buddy said with less conviction now, but his sister was sleeping hard and it took him a while to awaken her, and the bus was slowing, turning, and when she finally opened

her eyes and wiped her mouth they had stopped at the station and he had forgotten what he wanted to tell her.

Before the bus even came to a halt, the bird lady had stood and pushed her way down the aisle with her cage and her suitcase so that she would be the first off, ahead of all the people who sat in the front of the bus.

Let me tell you, Joanie said, smoothing down her hair, which the air through the windows had ruffled, and looking at the lady who stood there so large at the front of the bus, Busybodies like that nasty old thing I certainly will not be missing up in Maine. From what I hear, them Yankees keep to themselves, as well they should.

They came off the bus into the long shadows of afternoon, the high spiky palm trees and the heritage oaks broad and dripping with moss. They took turns using the facilities at the bus station. While Buddy was waiting outside with the suitcases, and Joanie was inside the restroom, there came a terrible shriek and she ran out without even washing her hands. It's gone, she said. It's gone. I looked in my pocketbook for a comb and my hundred-dollar bill is gone. I'm never going to be able to buy my books and such now. And she sat down on her suitcase and screamed, low, into her hands.

Buddy sat beside her on his own suitcase and put his arm around her and began to cry, because he missed his mother so.

There were other people in the station walking around, but nobody bothered them. At last Joanie stopped screaming into her hands and got up and went back into the bathroom to wash her face, and when she came out she seemed somehow smaller and her face was blotchy but set.

What's that? she said, seeing the paper bag of food on his lap.

Bird lady give it to me, he said.

She opened the bag and whistled. Enough food here for days, she said. She looked at him. They'll be feeding you where you're going. Three square, they said. You mind if I take this, Bud? It'll feed me all the way until I get where I'm going, and she didn't wait to hear what he said, but just packed it into her suitcase.

Ham in there, he said sadly, his stomach feeling empty. And cookies.

We got about a mile to walk, she said. You still feeling pretty strong, Buddy? she said.

Real strong, Buddy said, and took both of the suitcases and set off again, following his sister through the late afternoon.

Buddy liked the neighborhoods they were walking through, the big wooden houses with their porches, all the people out walking their dogs. There were young people, too, in twos and threes, and when Joanie watched them something that had died in her face back at the station came alive again. Bet they're students up at the university, she murmured. Bet they're out here because their brains are too stuffed with symphonies and history and classical Greek and they got to walk it all out to be able to sleep at night. And she smiled at Buddy and said kindly, In some ways, you're going off to your kind of college, too, I guess.

There was still light in the air when they crossed the big road and saw the sign. The name change was so recent that the blasted old board with "Florida Farm Colony for Epileptic and Mentally Deficient Children" still hung on the left, while on the right there was a fresh-painted sign that said "Sunland."

Sunland, Joanie said, that's right, that's what they're calling it now. Doesn't that sound nice, Buddy. A land of sun.

That's where Mama's at, Joanie? Buddy said, and Joanie looked at him and her whole body started to shake. No, baby, she said, Mama's not there.

Then she said soft and fast to herself, Oh, my God, what am I doing? What am I doing? Mama always said she had me to take care of you in case something happened to her, and look what I'm doing.

But Buddy had turned eagerly toward the place, and was now walking fast up to the gate where the guard was snoozing in his hut, a little transistor radio playing beside him. Wait, Buddy, Joanie called out behind him.

You must be Robert, ain't you, boy? the guard said. I was beginning to despair for you. They said you was coming today, but it's near time to lock the gates. And here you are.

Here I am, Buddy said. I'm Buddy.

Fifteen more minutes and you woulda had to find a place to stay for the night, come back in the morning, the guard said to Joanie.

I'm sorry, sir, she said. She was pale all over, even in her lips.

The guard spoke into his walkie-talkie, and a garbled sound came back out.

Through the gate they could see straight lines of sago palms and oleanders, lights on in the windows of the great plain white wooden buildings scattered around on the sparse grass. Buddy grasped the gate and pressed his face painfully between the metal bars to look harder. One of the doors of the closest building opened and out of it three figures in white appeared and began to descend the stairs, shining backlit in the warm light that poured out from inside and painted the grass and the trees framing the building with gold.

Oh, Buddy breathed, because the sight was beautiful to him.

Bud, listen to me, Joanie said quickly beside him. I'll come back for you. I'll get my education, then I'll get my job, and when I have enough money to support us both I'll come back to get you. Oh, Lord, forgive me.

But Buddy wasn't listening. He was watching the three stout women in white coming closer to him across the path. From this distance he couldn't see their faces. Any one of them could be his mama. The early moon hung in the blue of the end of the day above, and, in the distance, a cat darted swiftly across the grounds, and Joanie, who smelled like sweat and onions and like herself, rose up on her toes and kissed his cheek. The evening breeze lifted from across the farm fields with its warm smell of cows and dirt and touched him on his face and hands and neck, and in the smell there was something wilder, something off the wet and teeming prairie a few miles away, with its dark, terrible beasts below the water, the delicate angelic birds on their long, thin legs above. In this moment, something inside him that was always singing, that nobody else could hear, sang louder, sang until the women came so close that at last they showed their faces. Then Joanie, whom he looked at, trying to understand, turned her own face from him and began to walk away, fast, and did not look back. ♦

NEWYORKER.COM

Lauren Groff on faith and Flannery O'Connor.



THE CURRENT CINEMA

HE THAT PLAYS THE KING

"Elvis."

BY ANTHONY LANE

Last year was not great for Elvis Presley. According to *Forbes*, which tallies up the take-home pay of the dead, he made a mere thirty million dollars in 2021—more than Arnold Palmer, it's true, but less than Bing Crosby and Dr. Seuss. Elvis can rest easy, though. This year, his income could see a healthy spike, thanks to the latest Baz Luhrmann film, "Elvis," which features Austin Butler in the title role. Presleyologists will learn nothing here, and purists will find plenty against which to rail. Less knowing viewers, however, may well be sucked in by Luhrmann's lively telling of the tale. This is not a movie for suspicious minds.

Any fan of musical bio-pics will be familiar with the form: a hop, a skip, and a jump from one highlight to the next. (Some of the highs, needless to say, are lows.) In the case of Elvis, this means that we meet him in his youth—played by the striking Chaydon Jay, the rare intensity of whose gaze really does set the kid apart. Hurrying onward, we get a pit stop of Elvis as a truck driver, with his guitar swung up over his shoulder like a

Baz Luhrmann's bio-pic stars Austin Butler as Presley and Tom Hanks as his manager, Colonel Tom Parker.

ILLUSTRATION BY NADA HAYEK

rifle; the cyclonic sight of Elvis onstage, pretty in pink, and whipping a crowd into a Dionysian froth; Elvis on the Steve Allen show, in white tie and tails, singing "Hound Dog" to a gloomy pooch; Elvis escaping to Beale Street, in Memphis, to hang out with B. B. King (Kelvin Harrison, Jr.) and to revel in Little Richard (Alton Mason); Elvis in Army uniform, looking impossibly spiffy and pitching his woo to Priscilla (Olivia DeJonge), the daughter of a captain; Elvis lamenting the deaths of Martin Luther King, Jr., and Robert Kennedy; Elvis lounging inside a vowel on the Hollywood sign, and being told that his career is "in the toilet"; Elvis performing in residence at the International Hotel, in Las Vegas, flush with renewed success; and Elvis sitting sadly in a limousine, beside a private jet, and saying to Priscilla, "I'm gonna be forty soon, 'Cilla. *Forty*." Has the prospect of age never occurred to him until now? Two years later, he is gone, though the movie spares us the unlovely particulars of his end.

Guiding us through this strange saga, in which the most private moments feel like public property, is Colonel Tom Parker. As has long been established, he was not a proper colonel, or a Parker, or even a Tom. He was a Dutchman, Andreas Cornelis van Kuijk, who went to America and erected a new identity for himself, as breezily as someone putting up a big top. He became Elvis's manager, magus, m.c., and (many would argue) terminator. Were Kevin Spacey not otherwise engaged, he'd be a natural fit for the part. Instead, it goes to Tom Hanks, with a sharpened nose, a shiny pate, and a cladding of false fat. For dedicated Hanksians like me, these are confusing times; compare the trailer for Disney's upcoming "Pinocchio," in which Hanks—Einstein wig, a hedge of mustache, and, I suspect, yet another nose—assumes the role of Geppetto. At present, for whatever reason, this most trusted of actors has chosen to seek cover in camouflage and to specialize in the pulling of strings, whether wicked or benign. As Parker says, in one of many voice-overs, "I didn't kill him. I made Elvis Presley." It's a real boy!

How do you wish yourself upon a star? Simple. Parker takes Elvis on a Ferris wheel, stops at the top of the ride, and, like the Devil, sheweth him all the kingdoms of the world. "Are you ready to fly?" Parker asks. There is nothing subtle about the staging of such scenes, but then Luhrmann, as was evident in "Moulin Rouge!" (2001), makes a proud virtue of unsubtlety. Little is left unspoken or half concealed. Young Elvis, for instance, peering through a crack in a shack, spies a couple of dancers, writhing and perspiring to the lusty wail of the blues; he then runs to a nearby tent, sneaks inside, and enters a Black revivalist meeting, which gives him the Pentecostal shakes. The proximity of the two locations is frankly ludicrous, but it allows Luhrmann to hammer home his point: the Presley sound was forged in a double ardor, sacred *and* profane. You don't say.

As with every chronicle, there are gaps where you least expect them. Thus, any Elvis addict is steeped in the lore of July, 1954—the late session at Sun Studio, in Memphis, when Elvis, together with Scotty Moore, on lead guitar, and Bill Black, on bass, was about to call it a night, dissatisfied with what they'd done so far. For a lark, they began messing around with an old number called "That's All Right, Mama," taking it at a driven but drumless lick. The producer, Sam Phillips, roused to action by what he was hearing, told them to start again. As earthquakes go, it was all the more potent for being so comically casual, and it cries out to be dramatized; imagine what Robert Altman or Jonathan Demme might have done with such a scene. But Luhrmann gives it barely a glance. He prefers spectacular set pieces, stretched out instead of whittled down. Hence the space that he grants to the famous comeback concert of 1968, with Elvis resplendent in black leather, and, later, to a large slab of Vegas-era pomp, with Elvis all aglow in studded white, like a naughty angel on the loose. The curious thing is that both events already exist as visual records. The first was a TV production, the most popular broadcast of the season, and the second was enshrined in a 1970 documentary, "Elvis: That's the Way It Is." Both can be streamed whenever you please. Luhrmann may be kicking up a storm, but the thunder is nothing new.

Grab a bathroom break in the middle of "Elvis" and you could easily miss the speediest part of the film. This is a montage devoted to Elvis's least purple patch, in which he headed west, at Parker's urging, to be a movie star. The result included such immortal works as "Girls! Girls! Girls!" (1962) and "Clambake" (1967), and "Elvis" duly supplies its hero with a leading man's lament. "I'm so tired of playing Elvis Presley," he says. My guess is that Luhrmann, like other admirers, is so embarrassed by the sight of such doldrums that he wants to get 'em over with and sail on. Is he right?

Not entirely. Not if you follow the money. To ignore Elvis as a commercial machine, in his earning power as in his fabled spending, is to clean up the myth of the man, and to parse the box-office returns for 1961, noting that Elvis's "Blue Hawaii" made more than "Judgment at Nuremberg" (and, indeed, more than "Breakfast at Tiffany's"), is to inch your way into the America of the time. The Mississippi Midas, who grew up as a mother-loving only child, of lowly stock, had somehow wound up *here*, crooning to his ukulele; it was a miracle of transfiguration, and who wouldn't buy into that? Elvis's movies are, among other things, a showcase of his manners, and that eager courtesy, too, is a selling point. Of the blazing affair that he had with Ann-Margret, when they made "Viva Las Vegas" (1964), all that survives in the film are sparks of merriment. He is flattened rather than deepened by the range of his paper-thin roles—cowboy, racecar driver, frogman, pilot, or, in "Tickle Me" (1965), a rodeo rider at an all-female ranch—and he appears to be physically airbrushed by the sheen of the screen. That is why Andy Warhol based a series of silvery prints on a still from "Flaming Star," a 1960 Western, in which Elvis is posed as a gunslinger. His revolver is aimed toward us, and, if it's loaded, it's full of blanks.

All of which, to those who sensed the explosive charge of the earlier Elvis, is a travesty, a tragedy, and a kind of creative death. Greil Marcus, in his majestic essay "Elvis: Presliad," refers to "the all-but-complete assimilation of a revolutionary musical style into the mainstream of American culture, where no one is challenged and no one is threatened." The question is whether Luhrmann's "Elvis" feeds that continuing process of absorption or strives to hold out against it. The film certainly

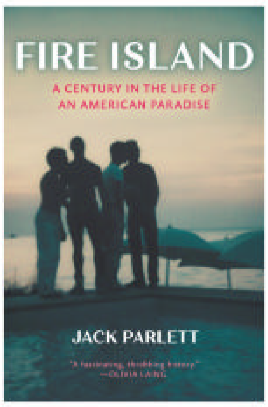
looks provocative enough, with the camera refusing to sit still, the credits dripping with bling, and the Ferris wheel dissolving into the spinning label of a 45. Now and then, Luhrmann cheerfully slices up the frame like someone making a banana split. But aesthetic mischief, however hyperactive, is not the same as risk, and, given how the movie shies away from sex and drugs (we see a rattling handful of pills, hardly the pharmaceutical candy store of legend), what hope is there for rock and roll?

Well, there are flickers of danger in Austin Butler's Elvis, as he advances to the brink of the stage, at a Memphis ballpark, and stokes the hysteria of the throng. (Parker is so alarmed that he summons the cops.) For the most part, though, what Butler brings out is the charm of the character, with his Hawaii-blue eyes, and his compliant lightness of heart. I didn't quite believe in the tears that he sheds after his mother dies; on the other hand, the ease with which he embarks on rehearsals at the International Hotel, making nice to his thirty-piece band and to his backing singers, the Sweet Inspirations, rings joyfully true. He tickles us, and there's nothing wrong with that.

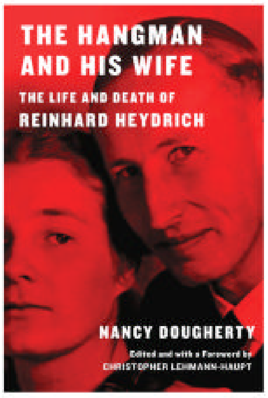
In short, on the spectrum of those who have sought to incarnate Elvis, Butler belongs at the tender end—far from Kurt Russell, with his tough hide, in John Carpenter's "Elvis" (1979), or from Nicolas Cage, who teams up with a club of skydiving Elvis look-alikes in "Honeymoon in Vegas" (1992), and whose whole career has been like a set of variations on the theme of Elvis. (For good measure, Cage also married Lisa Marie, Elvis's daughter, though not for long.) But let's face it: the first and the best Elvis impersonator was Elvis himself, and everybody who has played him since, on film and elsewhere, has just added another layer to the palimpsest, and thus to the meaning of the man. There is no ur-Elvis hiding below. We dream of being those folks who tuned in to Dewey Phillips's slot on WHBQ, in July, 1954, and heard the King sing for the first time, and felt the ground shift beneath our feet; but we can never go back. That's the way it is. ♦

NEWYORKER.COM
Richard Brody blogs about movies.

BRIEFLY NOTED



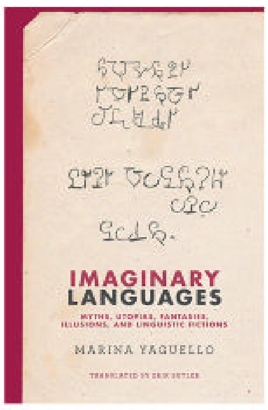
Fire Island, *by Jack Parlett (Hanover Square).* This richly textured history of a place "equal parts real and imagined," which has served as a queer summertime mecca for more than a century, unfolds like a pageant, populated by notable figures who have sought sun, sex, and solace on its beaches. Against a backdrop of tea dances, costume parties, and anonymous sexual encounters, we meet W. H. Auden, smoking at daybreak; Patricia Highsmith, brawling in Duffy's Bar; Frank O'Hara, killed by a dune buggy. Parlett captures the giddy excesses, but his real aim is to show how a community sought to define, protect, liberate, and celebrate themselves, realizing "the fantasy of a world away from shame and silence."



The Hangman and His Wife, *by Nancy Dougherty (Knopf).* Assassinated in 1942 by Czechoslovak resistance fighters, the Nazi official Reinhard Heydrich left few traces of his life, but Dougherty, who died in 2013, spent decades researching this account of his rise, most notably through interviews with Heydrich's widow, Lina. The son of an opera singer, Heydrich was dismissed from the Navy before becoming Heinrich Himmler's deputy and then the head of the Gestapo. Dubbed "the man with the iron heart" by Hitler, he comes across as an opportunist rather than as a true believer. Lina, willfully refusing to accept her husband's role in atrocities, claims that his importance is "always overrated." In photographs, she says, "he's shown where he really belongs, always in the second rank."



Keats, *by Lucasta Miller (Knopf).* Approaching the arch-Romantic poet through "Nine Poems and One Epitaph," this brief biography blends close readings of Keats's output with anecdotes gleaned from his letters and the accounts of contemporaries. Miller draws parallels between art and life—"To Autumn" is linked to political unrest, "The Eve of St. Agnes" to a woman with whom Keats had a relationship—without insisting on perfect correspondences. There are some personal asides, but the focus is on Keats's complex life and style, and the book's deftness and passion make it an excellent introduction to a poet who remains influential for his ambiguities and for language that "resists any final definition."



Imaginary Languages, *by Marina Yaguello, translated from the French by Erik Butler (M.I.T.).* Expanding on a study published in France in 1984, a noted linguist surveys the history of language invention, an enterprise undertaken by centuries of "lunatic lovers of language," for reasons philosophical, political, artistic, and arcane. Yaguello recounts the utopian impulses behind projects like Esperanto and Volapük; speculative fiction's explorations of linguistic theory; and the search, rooted in Judeo-Christian mythology, for an original, universal tongue. The mind-bending nature of the book's subject, which offers seemingly infinite paths of inquiry, could overwhelm, but Yaguello relates the material with gusto, offering an idiosyncratic, illuminating perspective on the development of Western thought.

BOOKS

MODERN FAMILY

Time was, you couldn't give it away. How did modern art blow up?

BY LOUIS MENAND



Making a market for Picasso and Matisse took decades—and many mediators.

Hugh Eakin's new book, "Picasso's War: How Modern Art Came to America" (Crown), isn't really about Picasso, or about war, or about art. Its subject is the creation of a market for a certain product, modern art.

One (mostly) good thing about the digital revolution, which is otherwise sucking us all into a plutocratic dystopia, is that the Internet has reduced the barriers to cultural production enormously. Many types of cultural goods are now much easier to make and much cheaper to distribute. You don't need an investor to capitalize your production costs or a distributor to get your stuff before the public. You just need a laptop and a camera (and maybe an inspiration). And, no matter how small you are, you always open worldwide.

It's true that when your product goes online it will be competing with a zillion similar products—and products that do have investors and distributors, such as streaming services, are much more likely to attract audiences and become profitable. But the Internet makes your work accessible to anyone who wants to see it or read it or listen to it or buy a copy of it, because barriers to cultural consumption are also much lower. Goods are far easier to access and to acquire.

Back when all of life was offline, back when to buy a record you had to go to a record store, back when there *were* record stores, the infrastructure required for cultural goods to get from creation to consumption had many more moving parts. These parts are the principals of Eakin's story. His focus isn't on the big-name modern artists, like Picasso and Matisse, who are offstage for much of the book. It's on figures most people have never heard of: dealers, gallery owners, collectors, curators, and critics—the components of what sociologists call the art world.

The art world isn't a fixed entity. It's continually being reconstituted as new artistic styles emerge. Twentieth-century fine art, in Europe and the United States, passed through a series of formally innovative stages, from Cubism and Surrealism to Abstract Expressionism and Pop art, and each time art entered a new stage and acquired a new look the art world had to adjust.

At the most basic level, the art world exists to answer the question Is it art? When Cubist paintings were first produced, around 1907, they did not look like art to many people, even people who were interested in and appreciated fine-art painting. The same thing was true of Jackson Pollock's drip paintings (around 1950) and Andy Warhol's soup cans (1962).

But you don't know it's art by looking at it. You know it's art because galleries want to show it, dealers want to sell it, collectors want to buy it, museums want to exhibit it, and critics can explain it. When the parts are in synch, you have a market. The artist produces, and the various audiences—from billionaire collectors to casual museumgoers and college students buying van Gogh posters—consume. The art world is what gets the image from the studio to the dorm room.

The general American public, in the period when modern art emerged, around the time of the First World War, had no interest in it. Wealthy Americans, the sort of people who could afford to buy art for their homes, had no taste for it. Even the art establishment was hostile. In 1913, a Matisse show at the Art Institute of Chicago instigated a near-riot. Copies of three Matisse paintings were burned and there was a mock trial, in which Matisse was

ILLUSTRATION BY MATT CHASE

convicted of, among other things, artistic murder. The demonstrators were art students.

In Eakin's account, the creation of a Picasso market in the United States—"Picasso" standing for modern art generally—took almost thirty years, from the first American Picasso show, at Alfred Stieglitz's gallery 291, in 1911 (eighty-three works, one sale), to "Picasso: Forty Years of His Art" at New York's Museum of Modern Art, in 1939 (more than three hundred and sixty works). The MOMA show, as Eakin puts it, "electrified the city."

High-end department stores like Bonwit Teller and Bergdorf Goodman began selling Picasso-themed clothing. A national tour followed, and from then on, Eakin concludes, "the story of modern art—the collectors who acquired it, the scholars who studied it, the museums that showed it, and the ordinary people who waited in long lines to see it—would be written in America."

Modern art had many middlemen and women in the United States—Albert C. Barnes, Walter and Louise Arensberg, Katherine S. Dreier, Galka Scheyer, Solomon R. Guggenheim, Hilla von Rebay, Hans Hofmann, Meyer Schapiro, Clement Greenberg. Eakin has chosen to center his story on just two of these people: John Quinn, a collector and an all-around cultural impresario, who died, of liver cancer, in 1924; and Alfred H. Barr, Jr., the first director of MOMA, which opened in 1929. Using these figures gives his book a certain symmetry: Quinn tried and failed to do what Barr finally succeeded in doing, which was to get Americans to accept and appreciate modern art.

Quinn was a successful Wall Street lawyer who spent much of his money in support of contemporary art and literature. He was not only an art collector. He was the principal American adviser and promoter of modern writers like William Butler Yeats, Joseph Conrad, Ezra Pound, and T. S. Eliot. He bought their manuscripts as a way of supporting them, and he helped make their work known in the United States. He negotiated Eliot's American book contracts at a time when Eliot was barely a coterie writer. He brought Yeats to the United States for a national tour. He arranged for the first American production of J. M. Synge's "Playboy of the Western World." He acted as a talent scout for the publisher Alfred A. Knopf.

Culture industries need to adapt continually to changes in the legal, financial, and political environment—tax laws, depreciation rules, government regulations, quotas and tariffs, the availability of capital, and geopolitical developments, like wars. In what was possibly his most significant achievement as a supporter of modern art, Quinn single-handedly got Congress to rewrite a 1909 tax law that imposed a tariff on imported art less than fifty years old while exempting "historic art."

Eliminating the modern-art tariff made it much more feasible for American galleries to exhibit and sell contemporary European painting. Most of the works in Stieglitz's Picasso show at 291, for example, were drawings, because they were assessed at a lower value than paintings. It was too expensive to bring paintings over from Europe.

Quinn wasn't just collecting for himself. He was on a mission. As Eakin puts it, he wanted "to bring American civilization to the forefront of the modern world." He thus operated as, in effect, a one-man art world. He subsidized New York art galleries, often buying many of the works they showed. He was a key figure behind the 1913 Armory Show, where the public could see more than thirteen hundred works of modern art, and where Marcel Duchamp's "Nude Descending a Staircase" became a succès de scandale.

When modern art was attacked for undermining American values—the *Times* called the Armory Show "part of the general movement, discernible all over the world, to disrupt and degrade, if not to destroy, not only art, but literature and society, too"—Quinn worked the press, giving interviews to New York papers in which he labelled unsigned attacks like that one "Ku Klux criticism." Over time, he built up a huge collection of modern European painting and sculpture, which he stored in his ninth-floor apartment on Central Park West.

The apartment was a rental. Quinn was rich, but he wasn't J. P. Morgan rich. Morgan spent something like sixty million dollars on art, most of which he donated to the Metropolitan Museum of Art, of which he was the chairman. Quinn didn't have that kind of money. On the other hand, Morgan was buying Old Masters (he was the force behind the 1909 tax law exempting "historic art" which Quinn got rewritten), while Quinn was buying work that almost no one else wanted. From the point of view of the American art world, the incredible collection he amassed, containing works by, among others, Brâncuși, Braque, Duchamp, Gris, Matisse, Picasso, Rousseau, Seurat, van Gogh, and Villon, was close to worthless when he died. No American dealer could sell it, and no American museum wanted to hang it.

Knowing this, Quinn directed, in his will, that his collection be sold at auction, with the proceeds to go to his sister and his niece, who were his only heirs. (Quinn never married, but he had relationships with a number of notable women; at the time of his death, his partner was Jeanne Robert Foster, the daughter of a lumberjack, an astonishingly beautiful and gifted woman who was closely involved in his search for new art.) Since Americans didn't want it, much of Quinn's collection of European art thus ended up going back to Europe.

Conveniently for Eakin's narrative arc, Alfred Barr, then a young art-history professor at Wellesley, was able to see some of Quinn's collection before it was dispersed, which allows Eakin to propose that one of Barr's aspirations when he accepted the directorship of MOMA three years later was to reassemble the Quinn collection and bring it back to America. This was impossible, of course. The pieces were now in too many hands. But MOMA became, in effect, Quinn's museum, and Quinn's canon (plus photography and a few artists, like Klee and Kandinsky, whose work Quinn did not collect) became Barr's canon.

And it is still MOMA's canon. If you walk through the fifth floor of MOMA today, where art that is owned by the museum and that was made between 1880 and 1940 is displayed, you will be looking at the very works whose art-world adventures are the subject of Eakin's book.

Probably hundreds of people pass by those works every day, and none of them seem scandalized, even by Picasso's eight-foot-high "Les Demoiselles d'Avignon," painted in 1907—five naked women in

a brothel, cubistically rendered, two with faces like African masks, aggressively confronting the viewer. (You need to stand very close to the canvas to get the proper effect, though almost no one does.) The shock of the new has worn off. This was probably not the kind of public acceptance that Quinn and Barr had in mind. But, as Gertrude Stein once said, "You can be a museum or you can be modern, but you cannot be both."

There is a Paris side to Eakin's story, too. Again, the focus is mainly on two figures: the gallerists Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler and Paul Rosenberg. (A third operator, a kind of freelance dealer and ladies' man named Henri-Pierre Roché, who referred to his penis as "mon God," and who scouted deals for Quinn, has a colorful part in the story.)

Of the circumstances that culture industries are obliged to adapt to, none played a more powerful role in the first half of the twentieth century than geopolitics. Kahnweiler did not sell his artists' work in France, even though his gallery was in Paris. His collectors were in Germany and Russia, countries where modern art was created and understood. But the First World War and the Russian Revolution shut those markets down. As a German national, Kahnweiler even suffered the seizure of his collection by the French government.

A decade later, the rise to power of Stalin and then Hitler made conditions much worse. The governments of both leaders made modern art a political target. (The Nazis referred to modern art as *Kunstbolschewismus*—Bolshevik art—even though it was equally anathema in the Soviet Union.) Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union did not just censor modern artists and writers. They imprisoned them and they killed them. After 1933, the year Hitler was made Chancellor of Germany, the United States suddenly became attractive as a place where modern art could safely be shown. Hitler and Stalin provided the tailwind for Quinn and Barr's mission to modernize American taste.

Kahnweiler and Rosenberg are keys to Eakin's story because both men represented Picasso, and Eakin thinks that Quinn and Barr were determined to make Picasso the face of modern art in America. He says that Barr regarded "Les Demoiselles d'Avignon," in particular, as a painting that could define MOMA's entire collection.

But Barr had a hard time persuading his board of trustees to actually buy art, as opposed to borrowing it for exhibitions. The museum mounted highly successful retrospectives of Matisse in 1931 (thirty-six thousand visitors) and van Gogh in 1935 (a blockbuster, and really the exhibition that established a public for modern art in the United States), but the trustees declined to purchase a single work by Matisse, and they passed on van Gogh's "Starry Night," an image that would one day grace countless coffee mugs.

MOMA's efforts to acquire "Les Demoiselles" is a good example of the twists and turns in the road from artist to public. When Picasso finished the painting, he let some people see it in his studio in Paris, where it acquired what Eakin calls a "cultlike status." But the work was rarely exhibited publicly. Picasso liked to hold on to his best pieces, and he kept "Les Demoiselles" rolled up for years. In 1924, he sold it to Jacques Doucet, a fashion designer. (Doucet's wife refused to allow him to hang it in their living room. The new was still a shock to her.) Doucet paid twenty-four thousand francs—about twelve hundred dollars at the time.

Barr knew where the painting had gone, and in 1935 he tried to persuade Doucet's wife, who was now a widow, to lend it to MOMA for a show on Cubism. She refused. But a year later she sold the work to a Paris dealer, Germain Seligmann, for a hundred and fifty thousand francs—about six thousand dollars. Imagining that he could get a good price for it in New York, Seligmann had the painting shipped to his gallery there, and that was how Barr found out that it was back on the market.

When he approached the MOMA board, however, the members balked at Seligmann's asking price of thirty thousand dollars. Barr exerted what pressure he could, including having art-world allies testify to the work's historical significance, but to no avail. In the end, he found a provision in a bequest to MOMA that permitted the sale of one of the works in the donor's collection in order to purchase another. He picked a Degas horse-racing scene and offered it to Seligmann in exchange for "Les Demoiselles," a transaction that did not require board approval.

Seligmann and Barr agreed that the Degas was worth eighteen thousand dollars. Seligmann had reduced his ask on the Picasso to twenty-eight thousand, and he now said that he would "donate" the remaining ten thousand—an act of generosity that was the financial equivalent of an air kiss, since no cash changed hands. As Eakin points out, the deal still left Seligmann with a three-hundred-per-cent profit.

And so, for the cost of a run-of-the-mill Degas, and almost thirty years after it was painted, Picasso's "Les Demoiselles d'Avignon," a work as apotheosized in the history of modern painting as "The Waste Land" is in the history of modern poetry, was finally available for public viewing. In 1941, the museum did acquire "The Starry Night," also through an exchange. Today, the paintings hang within a few yards of each other on the fifth floor.

The story in "Picasso's War" is well told, with an impressive level of biographical detail. As a picture of interwar transatlantic cultural exchange, it necessarily (because of the Quinn-Barr hook) leaves out a lot, notably Bauhaus and Dada, both of which had an impact on American art-making and American taste. But, as an account of the means by which Picasso and the styles of painting with which he was associated achieved cultural prestige in the United States, it's an admirable and enjoyable book.

Does it matter that Eakin doesn't have much to say about the art that his protagonists are scheming to promote? A little. Artists and writers do not operate in some otherworldly zone. They want recognition. They want sales. Like everyone else in the art world, they are responsive to the social, political, and financial environment, and this affects their artistic choices. Still, what mattered most to the artists Eakin is writing about was the work of their peers and the art of the past which they emulated or reacted against, and that is a subject on which many books have been written.

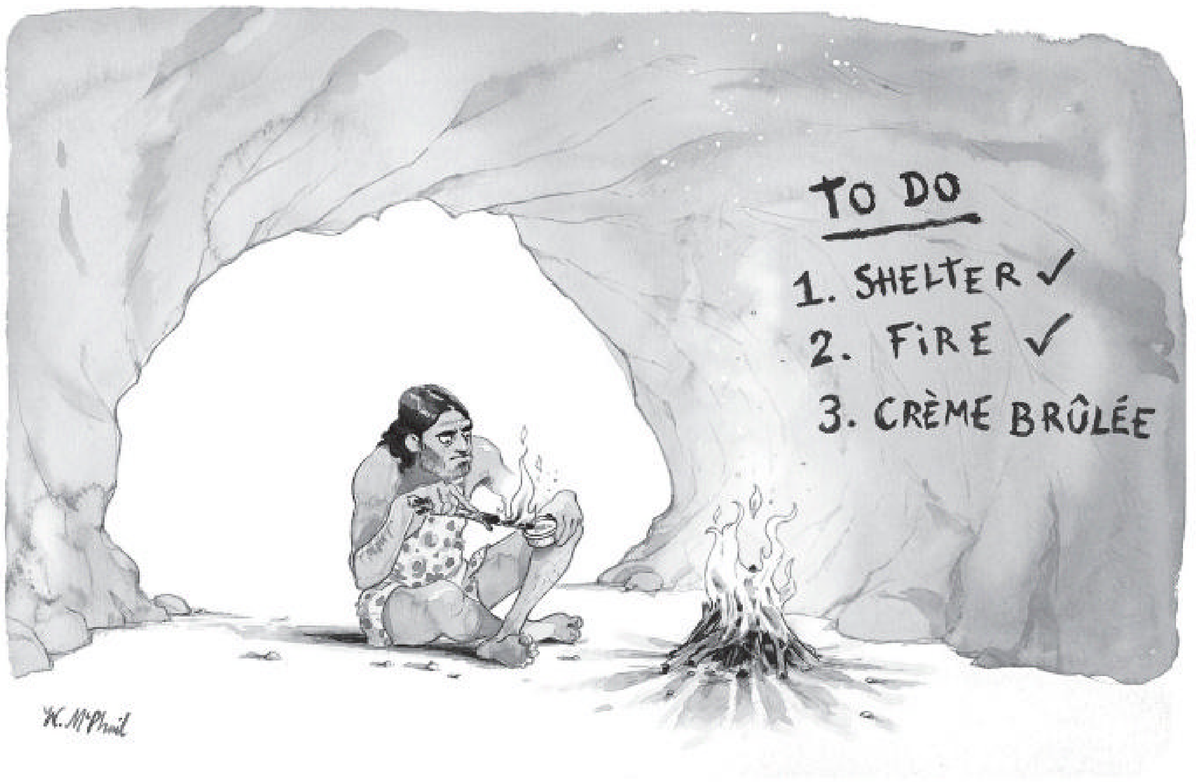
Eakin also leaves unanswered (and unasked) an obvious question: Why did Americans' tastes change between 1911 and 1939? It couldn't just be because Alfred Barr found the means to acquire Picassos for his museum. What turned modern art from a matter for connoisseurs

and academics into, to put it crudely, a middlebrow phenomenon?

The transition must have involved significant social changes. For modern literature, the work of writers like Eliot, Stein, and Joyce took a chronologically parallel route to acceptance and, ultimately, canonization. You could not even legally bring a copy of Joyce's "Ulysses" into the United States until 1934, twelve years after it had been published in Paris. But at some point Americans who aspired to cultural literacy started to feel that it was important to read "Ulysses" and "The Waste Land," and to know how to look at a Picasso and a Kandinsky. These were works that an educated and worldly person needed to have some familiarity with. What made people think this?

Quinn and Barr never met, and that was probably for the best, since they were very different personalities. Barr was a brilliant museum director who had an essentially academic approach to modern art. Quinn was a businessman. His edges were much rougher. His letters to the writers and artists whose work he advocated for reflect his complete (and completely pro-bono) absorption in their legal and financial affairs. And he seems to have been genuinely appreciative of their work.

But he was also a ranter and a bigot. Obliged to acknowledge this, Eakin quotes one letter in which Quinn refers to Rosenberg as "a cheap little Jew," and another, to Ezra Pound, in which he complains about the "million Jews, who are mere walking appetites" in New York City. This may underplay the bigotry. There was a lot worse to pick from. In 1919, for instance, when Quinn was trying to get Eliot's poems published in the United States, he grew frustrated with the publishers Albert Boni and Horace Liveright, who were Jewish. "It is a dirty piece of Jew impertinence," he complained in a letter to Eliot, "calculated impertinence at that, for that is the way that type of Jew thinks he can impress his personality. . . . Feeling as I do about this matter, of course I have the keenest possible feelings regarding Jew pogroms in Poland. . . . It also occurs to me that I might be willing to even agree to make a modest contribution and take a modest part in a pogrom here. There might be a couple of additional pogroms in the outlying districts, one in the Bronx and one in Brooklyn." We don't encounter this Quinn in Eakin's book. Nevertheless, three years later, Boni and Liveright published "The Waste Land," in a deal negotiated by Quinn. Business first.



• •

Is the art world, as we've known it, still intact? Obviously, the market is functioning. Art gets displayed, reviewed, bought, and sold. For a while, it seemed that painting and sculpture might be less susceptible than other cultural goods to the effects of digitization. Unlike a song or a book or a video, a painting is unique. A Pollock is worth millions; a copy of a Pollock is worth the cost of the materials required to produce it plus whatever permission fee was charged for the reproduction by the rightsholders.

It was therefore possible to feel that the monetary value of a painting correlated with its art-world value. Pollocks were worth a lot of money because museums displayed them, critics argued about them, art historians assigned Pollock an important place in the story of modern art, and so on. The art world could continue to perform its gatekeeping function in much the way it had in Alfred Barr's time.

But the Internet does not suffer exemptions. Nothing may go undigitized. Today, many collectors do not buy physical works of art. They buy art works (among lots of other stuff) in the form of N.F.T.s, which are purely digital products. They don't need the physical work, because they're not assembling collections; they're speculating.

It's not that people have never bought art on speculation (although, historically, you'd be better off in a stock-market-index fund). It's that the art world has started to come apart. Curation and criticism are increasingly detached from the rest of the mechanism. The market today is driven by dealers and collectors, neither group appearing to care whether museums and reviewers have validated the work they are buying and selling.

Certainly, art critics may feel that they're becoming irrelevant. In an article on recent sales at auction houses like Christie's and Sotheby's, in which very new paintings by very new artists attracted seven-figure bids, the *Times* art critic Jason Farago concluded that "the time between a new work's creation, digital dissemination, purchase and resale has become so compressed that the old legitimation mechanism simply cannot function." He worried that this might be "part of a larger and, in the end, hazardous cultural reversal in which numerical measurement, measured in dollars or in likes, are the only records of quality or importance." Welcome to the desert of the virtual.

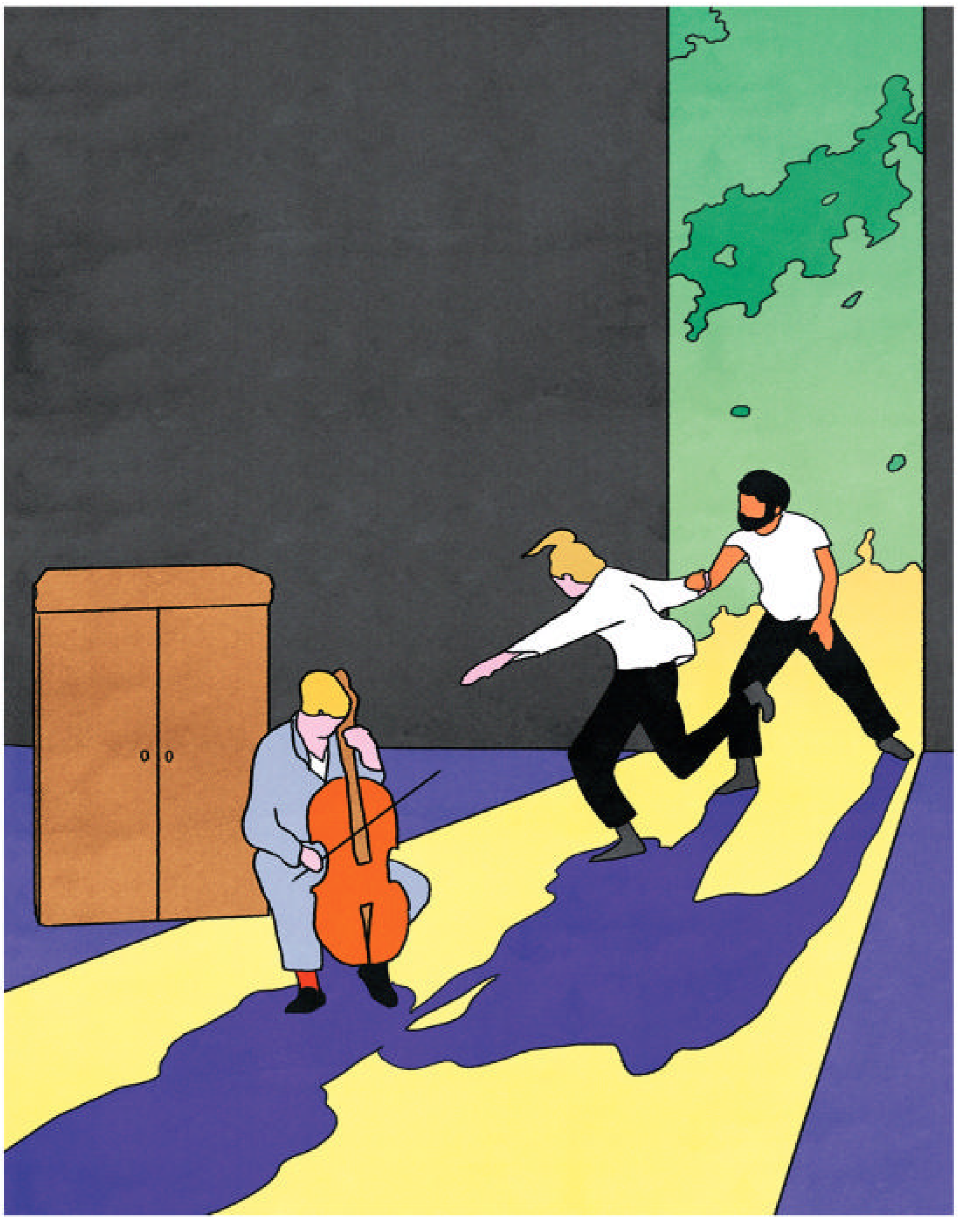
And are paintings still unique? Advances in 3-D printing may soon make it possible to produce a copy of "The Starry Night" that is indistinguishable from the canvas Vincent van Gogh painted. Your dorm room can look exactly like the fifth floor of the Museum of Modern Art. You may want to think about installing a gift shop. ♦

MUSICAL EVENTS

ANYTHING GOES

The Ojai Music Festival, more freewheeling than ever.

BY ALEX ROSS



In Or Schraiber's "The Cello Player," a soloist plays laments for two antic dancers.

Audiences at the Ojai Music Festival, the Southern California new-music jamboree, are accustomed to unpredictable goings on, but this year's edition may have caught even veteran attendees off guard. A percussionist ran in circles, banging tubular bells; a cellist played his instrument while sitting on a skateboard in motion; another cellist entered a performance venue with a wardrobe slung over his back; dancers in inflatable triceratops costumes waltzed in the town park. The festival culminated in a gloriously raucous rendition of Julius Eastman's "Stay on It," with dancers streaming off the stage and into the audience.

The Ojai festival, which has been rattling an idyllic mountain valley for seventy-five years, has a different music director each season. This time, the job fell to the American Modern Opera Company (AMOC), a youthful collective of seventeen singers, instrumentalists, and dancers founded five years ago by the composer Matthew Aucoin and the stage director Zack Winokur. Some members of the group have already found fame in the classical-music industry: Aucoin's opera "Eurydice" was staged this past season at the Met, and AMOC's resident singers—Paul Appleby, Julia Bullock, Anthony Roth Costanzo, and Davóne Tines—all have international careers. Yet AMOC, which is based at a commune-like complex in southern Vermont, allows more freedom than larger institutions can readily accommodate. Rigid hierarchies are replaced by a more democratic, borderline-anarchic practice. Specialization breaks down: dancers sing, singers dance, instrumentalists do both.

Democracy can be a messy process, and not all of AMOC's concoctions jelled. There was a minor surfeit of precocious nuttiness; more than once, I felt as if I were watching a brainstorming session for a future piece rather than the piece itself. But the let's-just-try-it spirit delivered more than a few jolts of insight. Tines, in a program note describing AMOC's approach to Eastman's unswervingly radical music, wrote, "What is possible if all members of a performing ensemble are present for every step of the creation of a performance?" Ojai made the possibilities clear.

Although AMOC has "opera" in its name, it spurns conventional definitions of the genre. Anyone expecting eventful plots, well-defined characters, or elaborate sets would have come away from Ojai disappointed. In another sense, though, AMOC's presentations are truer to the roots of opera than most modern manifestations of the form. The courtly masques of Renaissance Italy, from which opera arose, placed music, dance, and poetry on equal terms, with a playful spirit predominating; the idea of a composer masterminding a coherent drama came later.

The emphasis on dance and movement gives AMOC an especially original stamp. Its four dancer-choreographers—Bobbi Jene Smith, Or Schraiber, Julia Eichten, and Winokur, who studied dance at Juilliard—help to shape works from the start. Smith and Schraiber, who are married, met as members of the Batsheva Dance Company, in Tel Aviv, where they absorbed the "gaga" practice of the renegade Israeli choreographer Ohad Naharin—a liquid, loose-limbed, ever-gyrating form of movement that can be adopted by people who aren't trained dancers.

Enter the brilliant young cellist Coleman Itzkoff, carrying a wardrobe on his back. In Schraiber's piece "The Cello Player," Itzkoff played the role of a troubadour who brings his music from place to place—a clutch of laments, by Giovanni Sollima, Coleridge-Taylor Perkinson, and György Ligeti. After retrieving his cello from the wardrobe, he interacts

 ILLUSTRATION BY MARÍA MEDEM

with a pair of dancers, Schraiber and Yiannis Logothetis, who seem to be isolated souls—perhaps brothers, perhaps friends—locked in an eternal coexistence. The duo alternates between listless poses and precise bursts of synchronized movement: folkish prancing, slapstick pratfalls, belligerent lunges and swipes, moments of sensual embrace that slip away. It's a study in the complexities of male bonding, with the music suggesting a ritual that plays out time and again.

Related in spirit was a larger-scale work, "Open Rehearsal," which Smith conceived and directed, in collaboration with a dozen musicians and dancers. The piece grew from a pandemic-era project, titled "Broken Theater," that imagines a group of artists confronting existential questions when their audience disappears. In Ojai, musicians again stepped out of supporting roles and into the melee. The violinist Keir GoGwilt sauntered about playing Bach's Chaconne in D Minor while tensions among the artists built to a moment of violence. At the end, the dancer Vinson Fraley sang a piercingly gorgeous rendition of Pete Seeger's "One Grain of Sand," which had the effect of an otherworldly consolation.

The sense of a return to operatic origins was heightened by the participation of the early-music ensemble Ruckus, whose founder, the bassoonist Clay Zeller-Townson, is married to Aucoin. At a riveting afternoon concert in the Libbey Bowl, the festival's chief venue, Ruckus added improvisatory flourishes and jaunty dance rhythms to an array of pieces by Bach, with the flutist Emi Ferguson virtuosically carrying the upper lines. At another concert, Ferguson joined the pianist Conor Hanick to première two movements from Michael Hersch's evening-length flute-and-piano cycle "scars plummet to the earth"—music of introverted intensity that promises to yield a large-scale AMOC work in the future.

Compositional styles ran a wide gamut at the festival, from the ethereal simplicity of Cassandra Miller's "About Bach" to the riotous, pop-flavored eclecticism of Doug Balliett's mini-opera "Rome Is Falling." Aucoin contributed a new chamber-orchestra song cycle entitled "Family Dinner." This greatly gifted but still developing composer did best when he shook off influences from older colleagues (John Adams, Thomas Adès) and found his own agile, spiky rhythm. The highlight of "Family Dinner" was a quicksilver setting of Frank O'Hara's "Having a Coke with You"; Appleby fired off the text as if it were avant-garde Gilbert and Sullivan.

One crucial member of AMOC missed the Ojai festivities: Bullock withdrew after testing positive for COVID. She was to have sung in Winokur's staging of Olivier Messiaen's kaleidoscopic song cycle "Harawi"; no one could assume her role on short notice, though the soprano Ariadne Greif adroitly took up some of Bullock's other festival assignments. The flexibility of the AMOC apparatus enabled a quick substitution for "Harawi." Tines, already scheduled to perform an all-Eastman program, added on his well-travelled conceptual recital "MASS," which ranges from Bach to gospel.

These appearances provided fresh evidence that Tines, recently the star of Anthony Davis's "X," at Detroit Opera, is one of the most spellbinding singers before the public today. In the Eastman sequence, he displayed visceral force and ironic intelligence in equal measure; in a rendition of Frederic Rzewski's minimalist classic "Coming Together," he applied a welter of nuances to the spoken text (a letter from the Attica prison inmate Sam Melville). And in "BALM," his and Aucoin's elaboration of the spiritual "There Is a Balm in Gilead," Tines broke Ojai's relaxed mood by recounting a racist slight that he had endured the previous night. In the town park, he reported, a woman had said to him, "I don't like anything about you, but I love your voice."

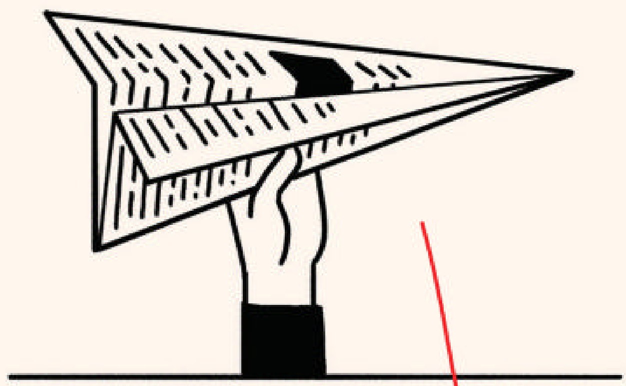
Ojai fancies itself a progressive place, even if in recent years it has become a playground for the Los Angeles élite. There were grumblings afterward: Did the incident require such a pointed response? Yet Tines was right to speak out, particularly given the awesome dexterity with which he did so. Instead of stopping to tell the dismal story, he *sang* it, improvising vocal lines as the AMOC ensemble vamped behind him. Whatever discomfort he engendered had ebbed away by festival's end, when white-haired spectators were shouting "Stay on it!" and dancing in their seats. Sometimes, politicizing art makes it more beautiful and true. ♦

THE NEW YORKER
The Daily

Special alerts for our biggest stories

The latest news and commentary

Reasons to love your in-box again.



Film, TV, and books pieces by our culture critics

Crosswords, games, fiction, and cartoons

Enjoy the best of *The New Yorker* in the Daily newsletter, curated by our editors.

Sign up now at
newyorker.com/newsletter

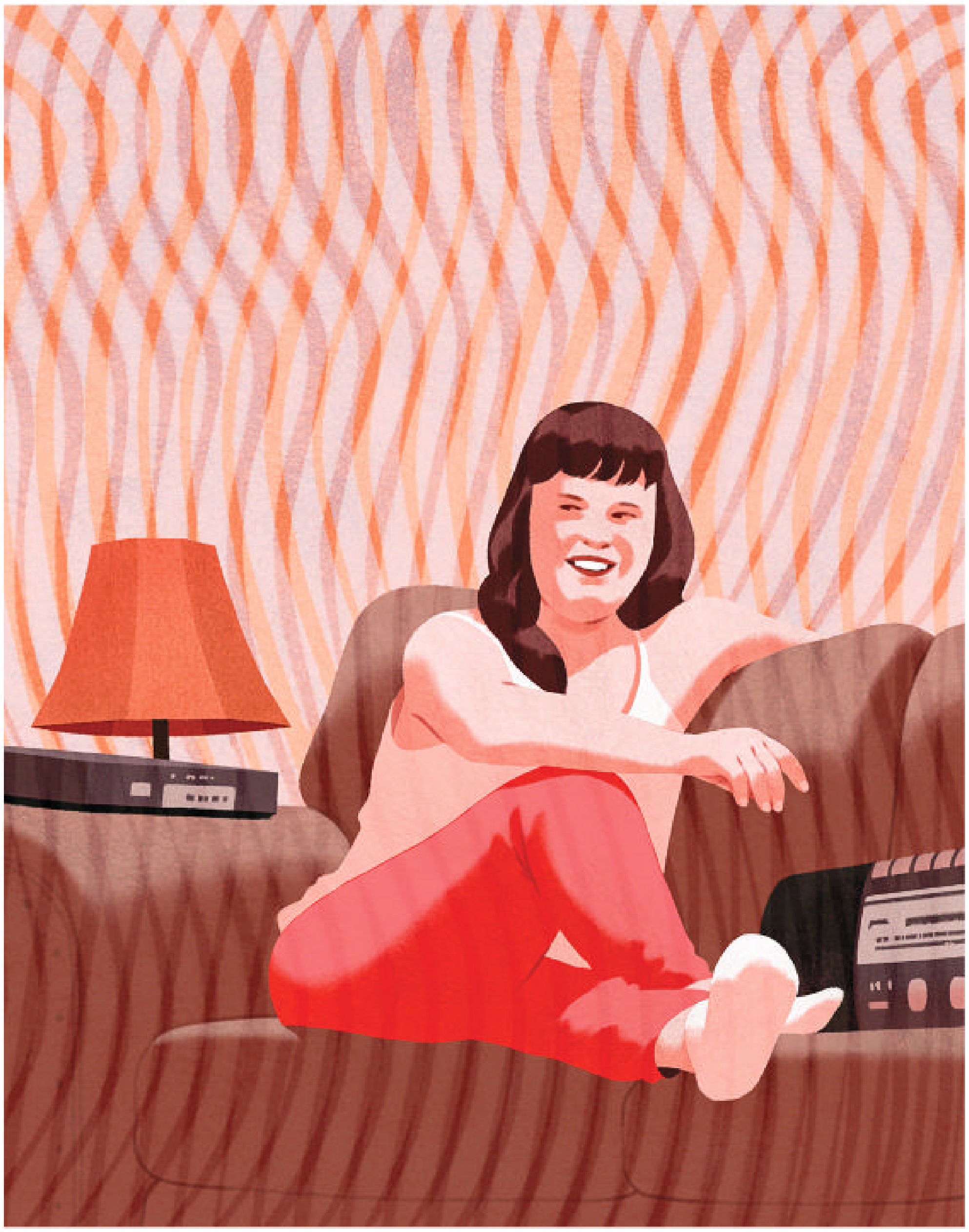
Scan to sign up.

THE THEATRE

LIGHTING THE WAY

Will Arbery's "Corsicana" and Brian Watkins's "Epiphany."

BY VINSON CUNNINGHAM



Great lighting onstage has an unplaceable emotional effect. You feel it in its swelling or ebbing before you get a chance to think. Sometimes light's power is totally belated: I realize how much certain arrangements of exposure and shadow have touched me only when, days later, I recover them in memory. One artist whose lightscapes tend to linger in my mind is Isabella Byrd, the designer whose work illuminates two furtively spiritual new plays: "Corsicana," by Will Arbery, and "Epiphany," by Brian Watkins.

In terms of their structure and their pacing—and, therefore, the demands they heap upon a sensitive lighting designer—these plays feel almost like opposites. "Corsicana" moves fleetly between its many scenes, with minimal set changes, and "Epiphany" unfolds with a slow, haunting mystery across one long, overstuffed scene. But Byrd's lighting, exerting a strong but delicate harmonic influence, like that of the double-bass in an orchestra, made the pieces cohere for me, forming a suite on the themes of the terror of love and the agonies of belief.

Byrd has worked with Arbery before, creating a dramatic, painterly palette for his play "Heroes of the Fourth Turning," from 2019, which was a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize for drama. The characters in "Heroes" are young conscience-tortured Catholic conservatives, and Byrd lit them with commensurate tension, using chiaroscuro to emphasize the stubborn doubleness of their emotional and intellectual lives. The characters in "Corsicana"—which is produced, as was "Heroes," at Playwrights Horizons, under the direction of Sam Gold—are less florid in personality but equally searching, using conversational volleys and long, shambling monologues as vehicles of uncertain, sometimes muddled, self-disclosure.

Ginny (Jamie Brewer) is a thirty-four-year-old woman with Down syndrome. Her mother has recently died, and now she lives with her younger half brother, Christopher (Will Dagger). Ginny is funny and earnest, equally insistent on her interests (the pop stylings of Shawn Mendes and Selena Gomez; the simple pleasure of a cold Sprite) and her pet peeves (hearing the Lord's name taken in vain; being told what to do). She loves Christopher, even though she thinks of him—quite rightly—as a stunted adult, too "lazy" and self-indulgent for his own good. Both siblings, in their mourning, are inarticulately angry and unsure how to help each other cope. "I need to do something," Ginny says early in the play, identifying her ennui without a sense of how to salve it. "I'm worried. I can't find my heart."

Arbery writes the dialogue between Ginny and Christopher, however ringed by sadness, with a sweet, intimate ease. Even moments of consternation feel amiable and well worn:

CHRISTOPHER: You think I'm lazy?
GINNY: Just a little bit.
CHRISTOPHER: Yeah we're just . . . Okay. We need to—we're just, like, little kids. We don't know what to do. Like we're waiting for her to come in and just be like, *let's eat*, *let's go to church*, *let's* . . . but we're just little kids.
GINNY: No, we're adults.
CHRISTOPHER: You're right.
GINNY: I'm 34 years old and you're 33 years old.
CHRISTOPHER: You're right.
GINNY: So we have to be adults.

"Corsicana" has autobiographical import for Arbery. "I wrote this play because I have an older sister named Julia who has Down syndrome," he says in his program note. "I've always wanted to create a play about what it's like to

In "Corsicana," a woman with Down syndrome mourns the death of her mother.

 ILLUSTRATION BY LEONARDO SANTAMARIA

be her brother. So I started writing this play which I've been writing all my life." It makes sense, then, that Byrd uses little of the brinkmanship that was on display in "Heroes." Instead, she opts for a bright, soft, natural-looking white light, often flooding the set at a sharp angle from opposite corners of the stage, spotlighting Ginny and Christopher with the gauzy ambiguity of memory. Bouquets of other colors—purples and pinks—appear only when the pair watches TV and the glow is reflected on their faces.

This frank, poetic visual approach works especially well when the actors take flight on their artfully awkward monologues, full of hesitations and repetitions. Brewer is especially precise and keen as Ginny. She has a clear, high voice and speaks in riverine, lyrical phrases. Ginny is often interrupted by the other characters—she knows that their constant interjections of "I know" and "Right" spring from their perceptions of her condition—but Brewer turns the interruptions into opportunities for unlikely rhythm. When Justice (the great Deirdre O'Connell), a close family friend, keeps butting in, Ginny says, "Just listen to me." And the rest of her aria—"I do have a body as a woman," she insists. "And desire as a woman"—is set aloft by lighting that looks like a glow from within. Ginny grows, all desire, before our eyes.

Justice was the best friend of Christopher and Ginny's mom, and now she's friends with Lot (Harold Surratt), who makes sculptures out of trash and has recently—and, we quickly understand, reluctantly—been profiled by the glossy Southern quarterly *Oxford American*. That background makes for a neat parody of the outsider-artist trope, but Lot is a true outsider in Corsicana, Texas, in more ways than one. First of all, he's Black. And, unlike Ginny, who says with forthright self-acceptance that her heart is "like this dream-wish about things," he's touchy about being labelled with an unnamed neurodivergence. At Justice's urging, Christopher hires Lot—who is also a musician—to help Ginny write a song. It's a thin strand of plot in a play that doesn't really want narrative encumbrances, and sometimes bucks against them, but that does want all these fitful souls to congregate and trade hopes and, ultimately, sing.

Lot's work is a "one way street to God," he says. He's got no interest in money or worldly success. He bristles at the outer world thinking of people like him and Ginny as "simple"—no, their lives are shot through with strong yearnings, deep and knowable, as undeniable but ungraspable as the light that kindles their eyes.

One constant worry during Brian Watkins's "Epiphany"—directed by Tyne Rafaeli, at Lincoln Center's Mitzi E. Newhouse Theatre—is that the lights will go off for good, leaving the actors and the audience members in the stark darkness of a power outage. Morkan (Marylouise Burke), a scattered older woman with a slapstick sense of timing, is throwing a dinner party in January for Epiphany, a holiday whose origins she doesn't know—and neither do all but one of her guests—but whose abstract meaning gets her thinking about togetherness among friends. She lives in the country, and the weather is vicious (the set designer, John Lee Beatty, never lets the audience lose sight of the snow), and the lights keep flickering.

You might think of those signs of oncoming electrical doom as angelic reminders to Morkan's mostly secular guests that the holiday—Epiphany is the traditional ending of the Christmas season, celebrating the discovery of the baby Jesus by the three wise men, who navigated their way to the Messiah by way of the stars—is a feast in commemoration of light, celestial and spiritual. "Epiphany" is, at least in part, a meditation on the unravelling that happens in a hyper-busy, post-ritualistic culture. Nobody can really relax into the party. When Morkan insists on confiscating smartphones, her guests freak out.

The moral streak in the play occasionally edges into moralizing and didacticism, but Watkins creates an atmosphere of real portent. Byrd emphasizes a warm, indoor yellow light, doubling down on Morkan's candles, which are lit over the course of the evening.

Rafaeli manages the big ensemble cast—Burke, Francois Battiste, Heather Burns, the stunningly good Jonathan Hadary, Omar Metwally, Colby Minifie, David Ryan Smith, C. J. Wilson, and Carmen Zilles, whose voice cuts a bright, tangy swath across the air in the theatre—with wit and fluidity. Most moving, though, is how Byrd creates a darkening tableau of the end of the night, full of gathering shadows, as the guests dwindle and time slips by. Light in the hearth, however merry, is just like the light outdoors—you'd better take a mental picture while it lasts. After its glory, it goes. ♦

THE NEW YORKER IS A REGISTERED TRADEMARK OF ADVANCE MAGAZINE PUBLISHERS INC. COPYRIGHT ©2022 CONDÉ NAST. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED. PRINTED IN THE U.S.A.

VOLUME XCVIII, NO. 19, July 4, 2022. THE NEW YORKER (ISSN 0028792X) is published weekly (except for four planned combined issues, as indicated on the issue's cover, and other combined or extra issues) by Condé Nast, a division of Advance Magazine Publishers Inc. PRINCIPAL OFFICE: Condé Nast, 1 World Trade Center, New York, NY 10007. Eric Gillin, chief business officer; Lauren Kamen Macri, vice-president of sales; Rob Novick, vice-president of finance; Fabio B. Bertoni, general counsel. Condé Nast Global: Roger Lynch, chief executive officer; Pamela Drucker Mann, global chief revenue officer and president, U.S. revenue; Anna Wintour, chief content officer; Jackie Marks, chief financial officer; Elizabeth Minshaw, chief of staff; Sanjay Bhakta, chief product and technology officer. Periodicals postage paid at New York, NY, and at additional mailing offices. Canadian Goods and Services Tax Registration No. 123242885-RT0001.

POSTMASTER: SEND ADDRESS CHANGES TO THE NEW YORKER, P.O. Box 37617, Boone, IA 50037. FOR SUBSCRIPTIONS, ADDRESS CHANGES, ADJUSTMENTS, OR BACK ISSUE INQUIRIES: Write to The New Yorker, P.O. Box 37617, Boone, IA 50037, call (800) 825-2510, or e-mail help@newyorker.com. Give both new and old addresses as printed on most recent label. Subscribers: If the Post Office alerts us that your magazine is undeliverable, we have no further obligation unless we receive a corrected address within one year. If during your subscription term or up to one year after the magazine becomes undeliverable you are dissatisfied with your subscription, you may receive a full refund on all unmailed issues. First copy of new subscription will be mailed within four weeks after receipt of order. Address all editorial, business, and production correspondence to The New Yorker, 1 World Trade Center, New York, NY 10007. For advertising inquiries, e-mail adinquiries@condenast.com. For submission guidelines, visit www.newyorker.com. For cover reprints, call (800) 897-8666, or e-mail covers@cartoonbank.com. For permissions and reprint requests, call (212) 630-5656, or e-mail image_licensing@condenast.com. No part of this periodical may be reproduced without the consent of The New Yorker. The New Yorker's name and logo, and the various titles and headings herein, are trademarks of Advance Magazine Publishers Inc. To subscribe to other Condé Nast magazines, visit www.condenast.com. Occasionally, we make our subscriber list available to carefully screened companies that offer products and services that we believe would interest our readers. If you do not want to receive these offers and/or information, advise us at P.O. Box 37617, Boone, IA 50037, or call (800) 825-2510.

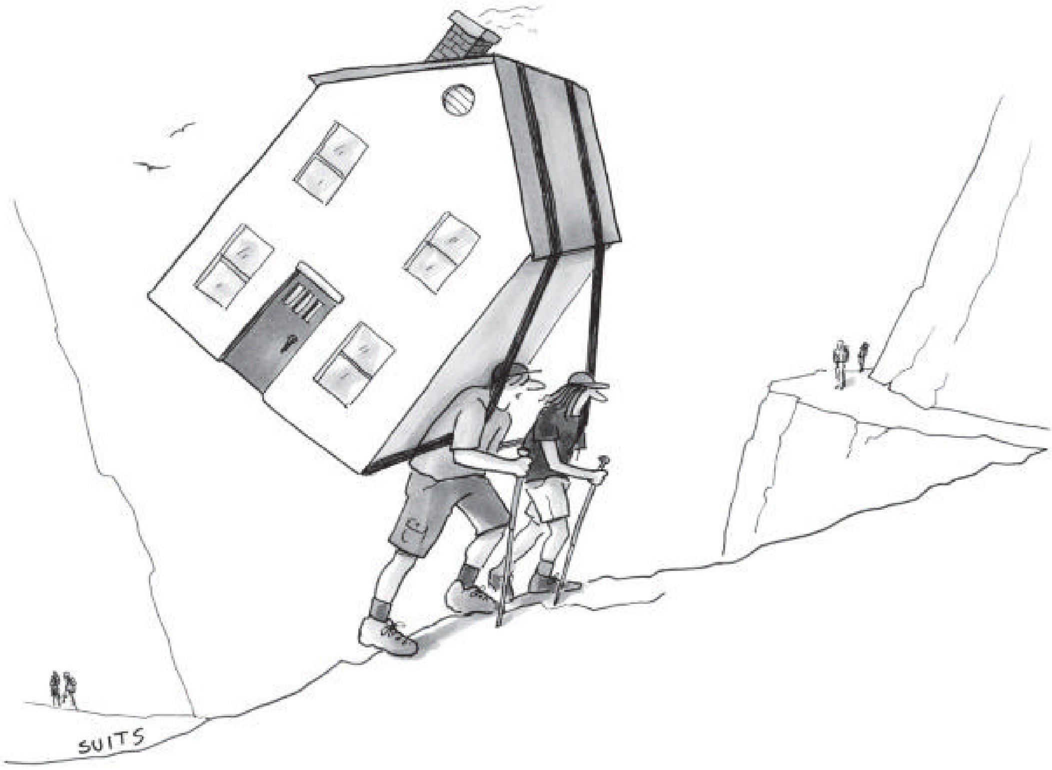
THE NEW YORKER IS NOT RESPONSIBLE FOR THE RETURN OR LOSS OF, OR FOR DAMAGE OR ANY OTHER INJURY TO, UNSOLICITED MANUSCRIPTS, UNSOLICITED ART WORK (INCLUDING, BUT NOT LIMITED TO, DRAWINGS, PHOTOGRAPHS, AND TRANSPARENCIES), OR ANY OTHER UNSOLICITED MATERIALS. THOSE SUBMITTING MANUSCRIPTS, ART WORK, OR OTHER MATERIALS FOR CONSIDERATION SHOULD NOT SEND ORIGINALS, UNLESS SPECIFICALLY REQUESTED TO DO SO BY THE NEW YORKER IN WRITING.

PLEASE RECYCLE THIS MAGAZINE

CARTOON CAPTION CONTEST

Each week, we provide a cartoon in need of a caption. You, the reader, submit a caption, we choose three finalists, and you vote for your favorite. Caption submissions for this week's cartoon, by Julia Suits, must be received by Sunday, July 3rd. The finalists in the June 20th contest appear below. We will announce the winner, and the finalists in this week's contest, in the July 25th issue. Anyone age thirteen or older can enter or vote. To do so, and to read the complete rules, visit contest.newyorker.com.

THIS WEEK'S CONTEST



" .... "

THE FINALISTS



"The hardest part was teaching him to use the hedge trimmers."
Jesse Horton, Westerlo, N.Y.

"It's how we tell the city mice from the country mice."
Ryan Menson, Roswell, Ga.

"The real scientific breakthrough was developing tiny corn."
Ralph Tropf, Los Angeles, Calif.

THE WINNING CAPTION



"I think he's been seeing the woman upstairs."
Matt Kerr, Woodbridge, Va.

Top 12 Rosés You Need to Try



POUR THE FINEST PINKS ALL SUMMER LONG
ONLY $69.99 + BONUS GIFTS

These are our 12 most refreshing rosés to sip under the sun, and we're offering them at a price you just don't see—only $5.83 a bottle as your special introduction to WSJwine. You'll also enjoy two bonus bottles of a 90-point Prosecco Rosé plus a pair of stemless glasses. It's all yours for just $69.99 (plus $19.99 shipping & tax).

Enjoy this delightful rosé dozen, then look forward to a dozen exciting wines (reds, whites or a mix) every three months, complete with expert tasting notes and serving tips. You take only the cases you want—saving at least 20% every time—and can skip or cancel anytime. We'll also reward you with more bonus bottles and members-only treats throughout the year. Plus, every wine comes with our 100% money-back guarantee.

See all the Top 12 rosés at right, decide which you'll open first and join us on a journey of wine discovery this summer.

WSJwine
THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

12. Gold-Medal Rioja Rosé
11. Vibrant Vinho Verde in Pink
10. Pure Provence Classic
9. 95-Point Australian Sensation
8. Gold-Medal Chiaretto
7. Superb South African Sauvignon
6. Gold-Medal Tuscan Rosato
5. Juicy Italian Discovery
4. Acclaimed California Star
3. Lovely Loire Rarity
2. Pretty Patagonian Pinot Noir
1. Gold-Medal Provence Beauty

ORDER TODAY AT
wsjwine.com/newyorker
OR CALL 1-877-975-9463 QUOTE CODE ACRL004
◂ OR SCAN



YOUR BONUS GIFTS

Two bottles of a 90-point vintage Prosecco Rosé and two stylish Dartington Crystal stemless glasses. *Valued at $64.97.*

Offer available to first-time WSJwine Discovery Club members only and limited to one case per household. Wines and offer may vary by state. 100% money-back guarantee applies to each wine. Offer subject to availability and club enrollment. All orders fulfilled by licensed retailers/wineries and applicable taxes are paid. You must be at least 21 years old to order. Offer valid in U.S. only (excluding AR, DE, MS, RI, UT). $75 shipping surcharge applies to AK and HI delivery. WSJwine is operated independently of The Wall Street Journal's news department. Full terms and conditions online. Void where prohibited by law.

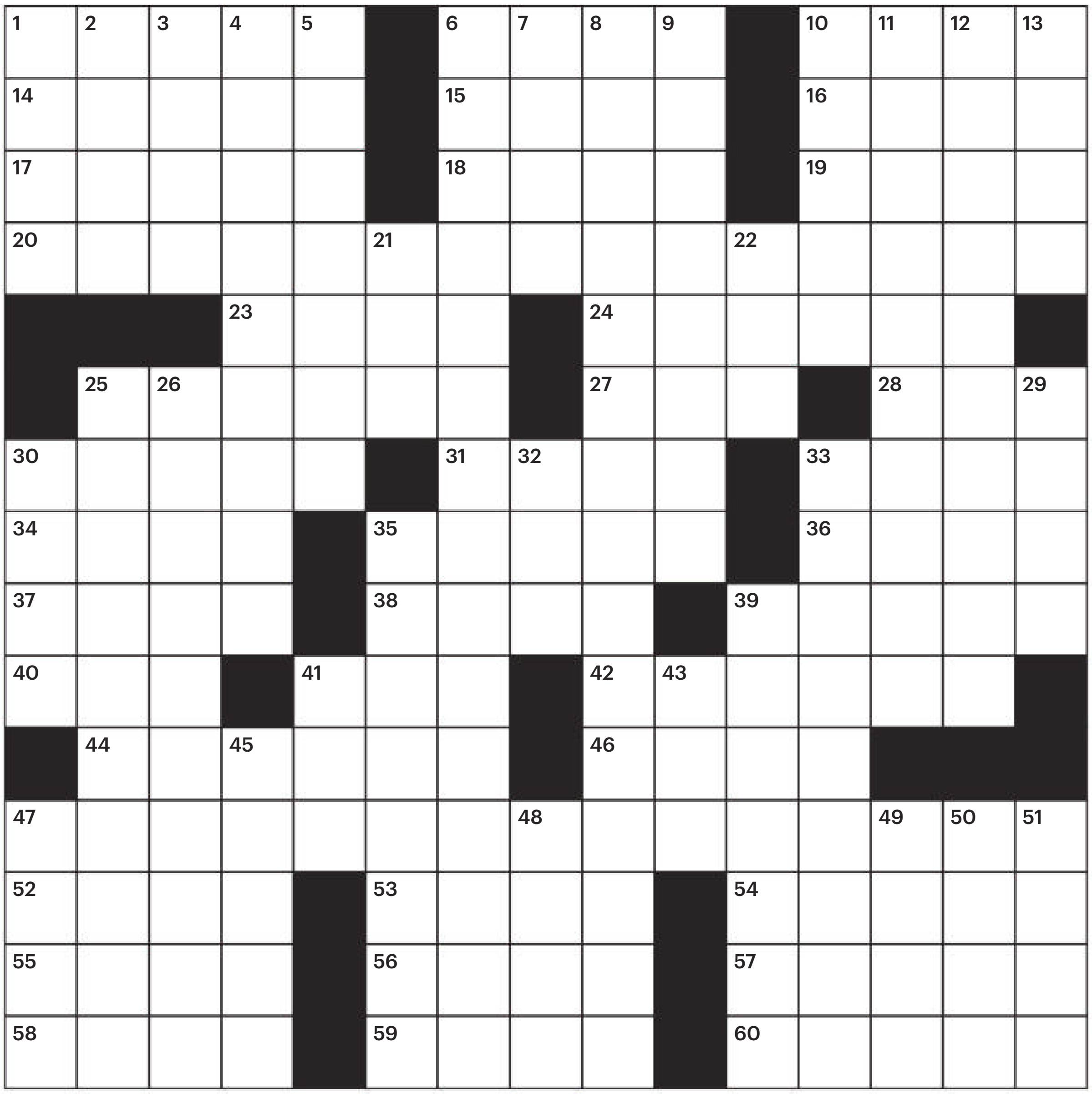
Trustpilot
EXCELLENT RATING

PUZZLES & GAMES DEPT.

THE CROSSWORD

A beginner-friendly puzzle.

BY ROBYN WEINTRAUB



ACROSS

1 Boggy habitat for cattails
6 Jabba the ___ (sluglike "Star Wars" villain)
10 Hard-rock band whose name is stylized with a lightning bolt
14 Get hitched in Vegas, perhaps
15 Alternative to foil or sabre, in Olympic fencing
16 Singer-songwriter Bareilles
17 Wisdom tooth, for one
18 Bread distributors that never come to you?
19 Gorillas and chimps, e.g.
20 One who's always wearing rose-colored glasses
23 Traditional Scottish garment that's sometimes worn commando
24 Goes around in circles?
25 Result of a belly flop
27 Liquor in a piña colada
28 Card required to get a blackjack
30 Word after "X" or "Rockford" in classic TV-show titles
31 Custardy dessert similar to crème caramel
33 "The ___ thickens!"
34 Manual reader, often
35 The "P" of the S. & P. 500
36 Non-twisty pretzel shapes
37 Scheduling guesses at SFO or LAX
38 Classic theatre name
39 It makes the world go round, per a "Cabaret" song
40 Article in a French newspaper?
41 Homer's mustachioed neighbor, on "The Simpsons"
42 Motifs
44 Sticky plant secretions
46 Luxury car brand whose name contains only one consonant
47 "A little higher . . . over a bit . . . oh, yes, right there!"
52 Uncouth sort
53 "Nothing ___!" ("Piece of cake!")
54 "Women on the ___ of a Nervous Breakdown" (Pedro Almodóvar film)
55 Showgirl in the Barry Manilow song "Copacabana"
56 Best Picture winner whose name rhymes with a Coen brothers film set in the Midwest
57 "When the moon hits your eye like a big pizza pie, that's ___"
58 Swirling current
59 Jay who hosted the "Tonight Show" before Jimmy Fallon
60 Gave up, as territory

DOWN

1 Joke that's widely shared on social media
2 Oodles
3 Nick Fury or Frozone, for Samuel L. Jackson
4 Little handheld fireworks
5 Internal injuries that can result from heavy lifting
6 Shop that stocks organic produce, nutritional supplements, and the like
7 "I've had it ___ here!"
8 Disappearing ink?
9 Trials before an official launch
10 Hoity-toity equivalent of "Me, too!"
11 Bank holding company with the slogan "What's in your wallet?"
12 Sets of rules governing sartorial expression
13 Target for an orthopedist's saw
21 Disease for which the Ice Bucket Challenge raised awareness
22 Pioneering PC company
25 "The ___ of the Traveling Pants" (Ann Brashares novel made into a 2005 film)
26 Words that might be followed by an incessant music loop
29 Online craft marketplace whose treatment of sellers was protested by a strike in April, 2022
30 Gasoline, e.g.
32 Fishy topping for a bagel and a schmear
33 "I need you to swear . . ."
35 Like vitamins taken during pregnancy
39 Emergency-airlift portmanteau
41 Govt. agency that Dr. Anthony Fauci joined in 1968
43 "Wait . . . what?"
45 Tramp, but not Lady, in "Lady and the Tramp"
47 Ready and willing partner?
48 Put one's John Hancock on
49 Encourage by means of an elbow
50 Fairy-tale meanie
51 Propped (up), as a golf ball

Solution to the previous puzzle:

■	M	O	O	S	H	U	■	L	A	S	T	A	C	T
P	O	R	C	H	E	S	■	E	L	E	A	N	O	R
E	N	D	T	I	M	E	■	M	A	R	R	Y	M	E
P	R	E	E	N	S	■	C	U	R	B	■	P	E	N
T	O	R	T	S	■	P	A	R	M	■	C	O	R	D
A	V	I	S	■	P	A	L	S	■	F	O	R	A	Y
L	I	N	■	E	L	L	E	■	H	A	I	T	I	■
K	A	T	H	L	E	E	N	C	O	L	L	I	N	S
■	L	H	A	S	A	■	D	O	L	L	■	N	O	T
S	I	E	T	E	■	H	A	R	E	■	C	A	R	R
A	B	C	S	■	C	U	R	E	■	P	O	S	S	E
N	E	O	■	T	R	E	S	■	L	O	A	T	H	E
T	R	U	T	H	E	R	■	G	E	T	T	O	I	T
A	I	R	B	O	A	T	■	I	N	T	E	R	N	S
S	A	T	S	U	M	A	■	S	A	Y	S	M	E	■

Find more puzzles and this week's solution at **newyorker.com/crossword**






THE
NEW YORKER
STORE








T-shirt season has arrived.

Visit The New Yorker Store and check out our latest offerings, evergreen favorites, limited-edition items, and more.

newyorker.com/store

Browse the store.


BASED ON A SHORT STORY FROM
THE NEW YORKER
CHRIS HEMSWORTH
MILES TELLER
JURNEE SMOLLETT
FROM THE DIRECTOR OF TOP GUN: MAVERICK AND TRON: LEGACY
SPIDERHEAD
NETFLIX PRESENTS A GRAND ELECTRIC / THE NEW YORKER STUDIOS PRODUCTION A FILM BY JOSEPH KOSINSKI CHRIS HEMSWORTH MILES TELLER JURNEE SMOLLETT
"SPIDERHEAD" MUSIC BY JOSEPH TRAPANESE EDITED BY STEPHEN MIRRIONE, ACE PRODUCTION DESIGNER JEREMY HINDLE DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY CLAUDIO MIRANDA, ASC, ACC EXECUTIVE PRODUCER SARAH BOWEN
PRODUCED BY ERIC NEWMAN, p.g.a. CHRIS HEMSWORTH RHETT REESE PAUL WERNICK AGNES CHU GENEVA WASSERMAN TOMMY HARPER, p.g.a. JEREMY STECKLER
BASED ON THE SHORT STORY "ESCAPE FROM SPIDERHEAD" BY GEORGE SAUNDERS AS FIRST PUBLISHED IN THE NEW YORKER SCREENPLAY BY RHETT REESE & PAUL WERNICK DIRECTED BY JOSEPH KOSINSKI
THE NEW YORKER
R
VIOLENT CONTENT, LANGUAGE AND SEXUAL CONTENT
NETFLIX
NETFLIX | STREAMING NOW